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Myaamia storytelling and living well: An ethnographic examination

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Myaamia storytelling and living well: An ethnographic examination

by

Haley Alyssa Shea

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major: Psychology (Counseling Psychology)

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The student author, whose presentation of the scholarship herein was approved by the program of study committee, is solely responsible for the content of this dissertation. The Graduate College will ensure this dissertation is globally accessible and will not permit alterations after a degree is conferred.

Iowa State University

Ames, Iowa

2019

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this ethnographic study is to examine the developmental relationships between *myaamia aalhsoohkaana* or “Miami Winter Stories” and living well for *myaamia* people. Living well is an individual’s lived experience of health or wellness and entails both the process of and responsibility to make decisions that contribute to one’s overall well-being. Research was conducted at the 2018 Miami Tribe of Oklahoma’s Winter Gathering in Miami, Oklahoma. Data were collected over the course of three days through observation of the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma’s storytelling event and audio recorded, semi-structured interviews with 15 *myaamia* individuals who attend the storytelling event. The field notes and interviews were subsequently analyzed using Creswell’s (2013) recommendations of organizing the data (through transcription and translation), then coding the data, and finally interpreting the data all using NVIVO software. Through a recursive coding process, I examined a picture of (a) how *myaamia* people understand living well, (b) how *myaamia* people understand *Wiihsakacaakwa* stories, (c) the relationship between *Wiihsakacaakwa* stories and living well, and (d) how individual development influences these relationships. Results show that *myaamiaki* do use storytelling to help them to live well which ultimately means achieving a sense of balance in their lives. This research informs tribal educators both in the content of stories that should be emphasized and the processes within storytelling events that will help to promote living well within the *myaamia* community.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

eehkwi kati ašiihkiwi pinaamihkihsinki, alenia eehkwi mihtohseeniwici,
kati nintaayaacimekooki noohsemaki, nintaayaalhsoohkaalikooki.

“As long as the earth endures, and as long as man is alive,
my grandchildren will talk about me, and tell stories about me.

-Wiihsakacaakwa, Myaamia-Peoria cultural hero (Costa, 2010, p. v)

When faced with difficult decisions about how to behave in a particular situation, people often draw from past experiences, role models, and values from the various institutions they are a part of. For *myaamiaki*, or Miami people¹, there are many examples to draw from. Historically, *myaamia* life was village-centered and typical tasks involved kinship interactions. However, because *myaamiaki* are in a state of diaspora today, it is often hard to connect with other members of the tribal community. Therefore, what is it that connects *myaamiaki* throughout time and space and informs them how to behave in varied difficult situations? There are likely many answers to this question, but one of those sources of inspiration comes from storytelling. Storytelling is one of the cultural practices that weave *myaamiaki* together, providing cultural knowledge, values, and language. Stories provide interconnectedness between all *myaamiaki*, affording a source of strength that allows growth over time both for individuals and the community as a whole.

My whole life, I felt as though I was making a difference for the *myaamia* community by going to the *eewansaapita* ‘sunrise’ summer camps, attending Miami University, and

¹ *Note.* Miami people refers to individuals who are members of the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma or Miami Nation of Indiana. The name Miami people use to refer to themselves is *myaamia* and *myaamiaki* refers to ‘Miami people.’

engaging in research within and for the community. As a child, I was the only one in my immediate family involved in this capacity, although that has since changed. I knew that the behaviors I was engaging in would make a difference and that I could ultimately give back to the community in a way that will never be enough to live up to the ways I have been provided for by my family and by my *myaamia* community. Then, one night, as I was skyping with *iihseensa* ‘my elder brother’ and *ataanali* ‘his daughter’ (*nihšimihsa* ‘my niece’), he wanted to show me the progress he had been making in teaching her the *myaamia* language. She was just under two years old at that time, and he took her outside and asked her “What is that?” while pointing to the moon. After asking a few times, she said “*miilshwa*”! He and I immediately started laughing because we knew that she was mixing the English term “moon” and the *myaamia* term “*kiilhsa*” to create a new word. This came after many times of *iihseensa* pronouncing many words just a little bit wrong. When I heard this and went to correct him, I was instantly reminded of a trickster story I, myself, have told at several storytelling events. This story called “Fox Story,” initially narrated by *tawaahkwakinanka* also called ‘George Finley,’ tells of the rivalry between *paapankamwa* ‘fox’ and *maahweewa* ‘wolf (Costa, 2010).’ This rivalry results in both characters being tricked and ending up in precarious situations.

It was at this precise moment that I realized this attitude that I had of feeling important because I had engaged with the tribe at an earlier age than my siblings, made me somewhat like *paapankamwa* and *maahweewa*. I realized that it doesn’t always matter *what* you do, but often matters *how* you do it. Even though I wasn’t having a rivalry with my siblings like *paapankamwa* and *maahweewa*, I approached language learning with an attitude that wasn’t helpful for anyone involved, particularly for the most important person in this

story, my niece. I was trying to make sure that the *right* terms were always being used rather than celebrating the achievement that my niece knew the *myaamia* term for moon. It was at that moment that many concepts that had been swimming around in my head regarding my dissertation converged. Storytelling impacts the ways we understand the world and can inform the particular behaviors and attitudes with which we approach situations. Stories are powerful forces that can transcend time and help us to engage in similar ways as our ancestors in the past and pass on those behaviors to our descendants in the future. They are culturally informed and develop over time. They change over time for each individual based on their past and current experiences. Ultimately, it is the basis of this dissertation to determine my hypothesis that stories can help us to be better people and live properly within a cultural context.

Theoretical Underpinnings

From a psychological perspective, one of the ways we might understand how storytelling impacts the individual's understanding of well-being is based on Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (EST; 1979). EST was originally created in hopes of describing human development within the multiple contexts with which individual interacts with. At first, EST identified a nested model of various systems that an individual is embedded within. These systems include the microsystem, which is the system of institutions that are experienced by individuals directly. Additionally, the mesosystem involves the connection between two (or more) microsystem institutions that both influence the individual. Furthermore, the macrosystem contains the culture or subculture that the individual is influenced by. Additionally, the exosystem comprises the linkages between two or more settings and at least one of the settings doesn't include the individual. Lastly, the

chronosystem identifies the patterns of transitions that a person experiences throughout his or her life while operating within these various systems. However, more recently Neal and Neal (2013) suggest that these systems are not concentric systems operating *within* one another, but rather comprise a network of influences (i.e., circles) on the individual that interact in overlapping, but distinct ways (see figure 1). Furthermore, a key concept of the overlapping circles is the recursive nature of the way that the systems change over time. Building on the concept of the overlapping circles is the notion that the macrosystem (in this case *myaamia* culture) is the grounding force for individual understandings of well-being over-time. The stories *myaamia* people tell are one of the cultural ways that this understanding is passed down. The stories that are told develop both the culture within the macrosystem and they interact with the individual over time based on the person's life experiences. As such, this paradigm helps to explain how *myaamia* people have many similarities with regards to the development of behaviors promoting living well and continue to live within different contexts.

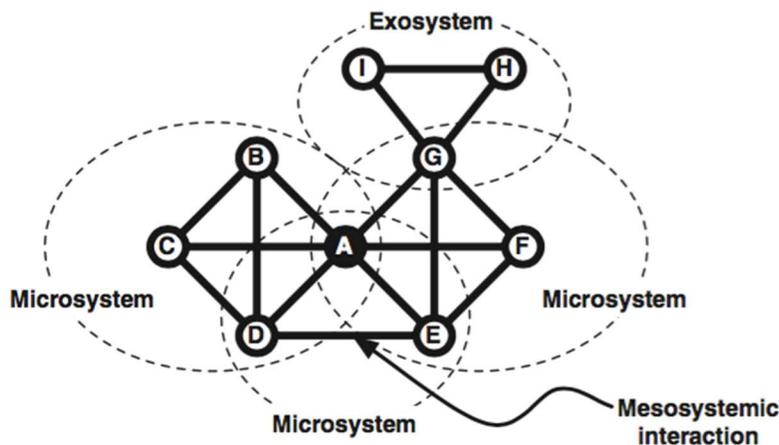


Figure 1. Networked Model of Ecological Systems from Neal and Neal (2013)

In conjunction with Ecological Systems Theory's broad theoretical explanation of the development of *myaamiaki* notions of well-being over time, Social Learning Theory (SLT) helps to explain one of the specific processes by which individuals use storytelling to learn *how* to live well (Bandura, 1969). Most notably, people (*myaamia* in this case) learn through stories in two ways: (1) vicariously through characters in the stories and (2) through the modeling of behaviors by other *myaamia* people at storytelling events. Vicarious learning refers to the learning that occurs through simply hearing about others' experiences and applying those lessons to inform future behavior. Modeling, according to SLT, is the process of one individual (the learner) observing and emulating the behaviors of another person. As an example of vicarious learning, in the anecdote above, I utilized vicarious learning through the lesson from the *paapankamwa* and *maahweewa* story to inform my own attitudes and behavior (i.e., not correcting my brother). Modeling would occur had I observed this behavior in another person and emulated that behavior at a later time. Ultimately, SLT describes this process in a concise and appropriate manner that can help explain *myaamia* ways of knowing.

The focus on storytelling and living well may also be in line with a strengths-based approach focused on understanding how individuals and communities develop resilience. Resilience can be described as one's ability to maintain positive behaviors and wellness despite experiencing negative influences on his or her life (Masten, 2001). More importantly, resilience theory describes the process of resilience including first experiencing a life stressor, then passing through *biopsychospiriutal homeostasis*, or the adaptation to that circumstance, then internalizing the experience into that person's narrative in a positive manner (Richardson, Neiger, Jensen, & Kempfer, 1990). This process often leads to

individuals' development of personal growth, knowledge, self-understanding, and increased strength of resilient qualities, equipping them to overcome future life stressors. This approach tends to identify resilient qualities and promote wellness through strengthening those qualities rather than attempting to overcome the problems of the community. As such, this strategy can be an effective means for intervening with various communities (Scerra, 2011). For *myaamiaki*, the promotion of wellness through storytelling is a strengths-based approach as this is an important cultural practice that teaches individuals and the community how to live well.

Current Study

In the current study, I use an ethnographic approach in which I examine, in-depth, a culture-sharing group's customs. More specifically, this approach helps me to consider how *myaamiaki* understand living well, how the storytelling content and process for *myaamiaki* is related to individual interpretations of living well, and any possible developmental factors within these relationships. Content refers to the information that is contained within the stories themselves and the process refers to the ways in which the individual interacts with the people and the information they receive (i.e., observing others at the storytelling event). Specifically, I am examining the following research questions:

1. How do *myaamiaki* understand living well?
2. How do *myaamiaki* understand (themes/values) *Wiihsakacaakwa* stories?
3. What is the relationship between *Wiihsakacaakwa* stories and individual understanding of living well?
 - a. In what ways does the content from *Wiihsakacaakwa* stories that help individuals to live well?

- b. In what ways does the process of storytelling help individuals to live well?
4. How does an individual's development influence their understanding of *Wiihsakacaakwa* stories?

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Purpose and Background

The purpose of this study is to examine potential relationships between storytelling and living well for *myaamia* people. A better understanding of storytelling will inform culturally-specific experiences for the promotion of living well for *myaamia* people, specifically, and support the larger focus on community-specific methods for improving wellness within American Indian communities. This study is embedded within a larger research initiative in assessing the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma's language and cultural revitalization efforts. Tribal leaders noticed in the early-mid 1990's that language and cultural revitalization was having positive impacts on the community as a whole. In 2001, Daryl Baldwin, linguist, joined the staff at Miami University and created what was then called the Myaamia Project and is now called the Myaamia Center. This led to widespread language revitalization efforts within the community as this relationship between the tribe and Miami University strengthened. In 2012, an assessment team was formed in order to broadly examine the impacts of the revitalization process on community wellness. I am currently a member of this research team and this dissertation is one small contribution to the greater objective.

Based on personal experiences with the tribal community, conversations with other tribal members, and preliminary data about tribal revitalization efforts, I believe that *aalhssohkana*, or 'Winter stories', may benefit the process of living well for tribal members. The concept of living well is not currently a defined cultural idea that is taught explicitly within our community. It is a concept intended to be left as a lived experience so as to

convey that there is not one “right” way to live well. Therefore, living well is an individualized experience that individuals interpret on their own through a community of connected learners. However, in previous presentations by myself in conjunction with members of the tribal assessment team, Daryl Baldwin and Dr. Susan Moseley-Howard, living well has been defined as the integrated and fluid concept of interaction and responsibility between all aspects of health.² It is the hope of the assessment team to ultimately gain an awareness of the types of experiences that individuals and the community as a whole understand as contributors to living well. Through both formal and informal observation as part of the larger wellness project, there seems to be a correlation between language and cultural revitalization (storytelling included within that) and attendance at our tribal events.

When I was young, I would hear informal family stories from my grandmother yet did not have awareness of storytelling as a larger community. Over time, I experienced some formal storytelling events that would consist of one or two tribal storyteller(s) and a few individuals in attendance. More recently, the assessment team has begun collecting data about attendance at our community storytelling events. At the 2016 Winter Gathering, there were 5 *myaamia* storytellers and 20 tribal members in attendance. In 2017, there were 6 *myaamia* storytellers and 60 tribal members in attendance (Strass, Baldwin, & Mosley-Howard, 2017).³ While these are the only observations we have to date, this observation of the steadily increasing attendance at the storytelling event occurs simultaneously with

² *Note.* Health is a broadly defined construct here indicating holistic balance between all indicators of health including the mental, physical, emotional, etc.

³ *Note.* There were approximately double the number of attendees at each of the Winter Gatherings in 2015 and 2016, but the number in-text denotes tribal members, specifically.

increases in language and cultural revitalization. Therefore, while we cannot conclude that storytelling is causing more tribal engagement, it is certainly one part of the revitalization process that is contributing to feelings of engagement and participation at tribal events. Because feelings of engagement and participation within the community are indicators of living well, the possible connections between storytelling and living well within the *myaamia* community are critical to understand.

Moreover, it is less well understood what the role that *myaamia* storytelling is having on an individual level. Through gaining an understanding of the ways in which *myaamia* individuals make sense of and utilize these stories in their everyday lives, we will also begin to understand the possible mental health benefits gained from them (i.e., resilience, morality, values, etc.). Additionally, in taking a developmental perspective, I hope to begin to understand how the meanings of the stories evolve over time for individuals. With roots in Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems perspective, I will examine how people's perspectives of the stories, living well, and the possible interplay between them evolve over one's life. Additionally, consistent with Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory, it is suspected that the interpersonal interactions between tribal members at Winter Gathering as well as the observations of others at these events also contribute to learning how to live well. With these theories in mind, we can gain awareness of the impact(s) of storytelling on the individual level and begin to utilize the results for promoting living well.

There are many national initiatives to promote wellness within indigenous communities. The National Institute of Health, National Science Foundation, and other organizations offer funding for individuals who conduct research with indigenous peoples and/or create experiences to improve wellness. Despite the focus on a pathology-based

model (see American Indian Health section discussed below for more details), there is a clear recognition that interventions need to be tailored in a culturally appropriate manner.

Understanding the ways *myaamia* storytelling relates to living well for *myaamiaki* may be important for help inform interventions promoting community wellness. If changes can be made to strengthen positive behaviors that contribute to living well through either the stories themselves or the process of storytelling, then it is important to gather information on what those changes might be. For example, the interviews for the current study could help us to understand that the humor in *Wihsakacaakwa* stories promotes memory for the retention and later use of the story's message in individuals' daily lives promoting positive behaviors, then it would be helpful to strengthen and promote the humorous stories within the storytelling events. In other words, the content of the stories can be used to promote living well for *myaamia* people. Additionally, the interviews could reveal that the stories themselves don't necessarily contribute to positive behaviors alone, but the observation of the ways in which others interact at the events also help individuals to learn how to live well. In addition to the content of the stories promoting living well, the *process* of storytelling may also be used to promote living well for *myaamiaki*. In this case, promoting the intentional modeling of positive behaviors by community members could be implemented in order to promote living well. While these experiences are different than the typical description of an "intervention," these types of learning are more congruent with the *myaamia* ways of interacting with and understanding the world and therefore might be more impactful. It is critical to align with a community's knowledge system in order to make change in that community.

In addition, focusing on stories and other cultural practices may be a culturally appropriate research methodology. For example, in an attempt to tailor the research process

in what they identified as “traditional” ways, Walker, Fredericks, Mills, and Anderson (2013) introduced the concept of yarning as an evolving methodology for data collection with American Indians. This method introduces a “conversational process that involves the sharing of stories and the development of knowledge” (Walker et al., 2013; p. 1). This method helps researchers to collect data within indigenous Australians’ extant processes for knowledge gathering. Other groups are looking at creative expression through art forms, digital storytelling, and video production (Gray, de Boehm, Farnsworth, & Wolf, 2010), language as a healing tool (Whalen, Moss, & Baldwin, 2016), and comic books (Montgomery, Manuelito, Nass, Chock, & Buchwald, 2012). Therefore, it is evident that research methodologies should align with the worldview of the group in question. The current study hopes to pave the way for recognition of traditional community events already in place (for example, storytelling) as health-promoting activities and, subsequently, for language and cultural revitalization to be promoted as a means to community wellness.

However, before I am able to delve into the theory and literature supporting the current study, it is important to understand the history and value system of the community being examined. After an examination of the history of the *myaamia* people, I will outline the value system that is the foundation for the ways *myaamiaki* understands the world. I will subsequently describe the concept of living well for *myaamia* people as it is intricately intertwined with the value system. Furthermore, I will discuss generally the benefits of narratives for human beings followed by the differences that are often experienced with indigenous storytelling. At that point, I will describe *myaamia* storytelling, specifically, and then discuss the theoretical underpinnings of the current study (i.e., Ecological Systems

Theory, Social Learning Theory, and Resilience Theory). Lastly, I will provide a brief overview of the current study and what to expect from the research itself.

Miami Tribe of Oklahoma Historical Background

“At first the Myaamia came out of the water. The place they emerged is called ‘Coming Out Place.’

The first ones emerged from the water. “Grab ahold of tree limbs” they told each other.

And they came out. Then they formed a town there. From there they went away. They left the town.

After a while one returned. When he came back he saw the other people at Coming Out Place. To our surprise, their language was just like our language. They gave them a name. ‘Old Moccasins’ he called those people. I don’t know where they were from. Nobody knew where they went.

This is how my mothers told me, my mother Seekaahkweeta, and her older sister Waapankihkwa. All the old Indian men believed it.

They call the river ‘Coming Out River’ at the place where they came out from. Because of this people are named ‘Seekaahkweeta’, ‘Seekaahkonanka’, and ‘Seekaahkohkwa’.”

-Where the Myaamia First Came From,
waapanaakikaapwa ‘Gabriel Godfroy’ (Costa, 2010, p. 52-53)

Storytelling is one of the main methods for *myaamia* people to transmit knowledge; for that reason, we know that “at first the *Myaamia* came out of the water” (Costa, p. 53). In our language, we call ourselves *Myaamia*, meaning “the Downstream people.” This name stems from the above story in which *myaamiaki* lived alongside neighboring tribes. The location *myaamia* people emerged from is called “The Coming Out Place” and has been identified as the waters of *saakiiweesiipiwi* ‘St. Joseph River’ near South Bend, Indiana. Today, this spot is called *saakiiweeyonki* ‘the Confluence.’ Our emergence at *saakiiweeyonki* took place at an unknown time in our history, likely after we split off from

another group on a journey from the north. While we know the specific location of emergence, it is difficult to know when this journey took place. We do know that our people lived in *myaamionki* or ‘*myaamia land*’ for many generations before the Beaver Wars that occurred around 1650 (Ironstrack, 2010).

After leaving *saakiiweeyonki*, *myaamiaki* built villages along the Wabash River Valley near Fort Wayne, Indiana. The tribe continued to grow in size until our younger siblings, the *Waayaahtanwa* ‘Wea’ and the *Peeyankihšia* ‘Piankashaw’ split off from the tribe. The story concludes with a man returning to *saakiiweeyonki*, surprised that there are other people living there who speak the same language. This group, known as “Old Moccasins” does not appear in historical documents or stories following this account. This story is largely important for our identity as it is what founds our homelands in *myaamionki* and emphasizes the importance of language (Ironstrack, 2010).

Over time, *myaamia* people established themselves in this land and sustained themselves on the wetlands, prairies, woodlands, river bottomlands, and the plants and animals that also lived in this area. *Myaamiaki* hunted animals like *moohswa* ‘white tailed deer,’ *lenaswa* ‘bison,’ and *miihšiiwa* ‘Eastern elk’ as well as cultivated *miincipi* ‘corn’ and other vegetables. In the spring, *myaamia* women went to the sugar maple groves to collect and process the sap into maple sugar. These sustaining behaviors resulted in cycles of planting, harvesting, hunting, gathering, and processing that governed the lives of *myaamia* people for generations. For *myaamiaki*, the land and ability to care for the community is the basis of living well as a people (Ironstrack, 2012).

However, the lives of *myaamiaki* were quite different upon first contact with Europeans and the establishment of what we now know as the United States of America. In

1846, those who had survived years of disease, war, and settlement perpetrated by Europeans were forcibly removed from our homelands and settled west of the Mississippi on lands in Indian Territory. This location is what we now know as Kansas. This was a difficult adjustment for *myaamiaki* as the lands were not the wooded land we were accustomed to, but rather tall grass prairies. The *myaamia* rebuilt homes, planted corn, and continued to sustain themselves only to be forcibly removed yet again in the 1860's and 70's. This removal brought us to current day Oklahoma, where our people are still headquartered to this day. In northeastern Oklahoma, *myaamiaki* found a home near the Osage and Quapaw people. The *myaamia* people found themselves living near other tribes who also were removed from the Great Lakes region like the Wyandot, Peoria, Ottawa, Seneca-Cayuga, and Shawnee (Ironstrack, 2012).

Resiliency of *myaamiaki* was demonstrated through the use of the tribe's language despite colonization and various traumas that accrued over time. *Myaamiaki* continued to use their indigenous language until the 1940's. During the 1960's, the last of the fluent *myaamia* speakers passed away, and many deemed *myaamia* a "dead language" at the time (Shoemaker, 2011). However, one *myaamia* tribal member and linguist, Wesley Leonard, reframed this notion suggesting *myaamia* was a "sleeping language." He argued that *myaamia* was a sleeping language as documentation of the *myaamia* language by Jesuits in the 17th century still existed. In addition, tribal elders who had been exposed to the language remembered bits and pieces of the language and were able to document what they knew (Leonard, 2008). In the 1990's, linguist David Costa began working on reconstructing the Miami-Illinois language. Together with Daryl Baldwin, a *myaamia* citizen and the director of the Myaamia Center on the campus of Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, Costa re-awoke

the heritage language (Shoemaker, 2011). Here, heritage language is used in a way to describe a language shared by a group that does not have many fluent speakers. The language, in this case, is a marker of cultural identity, but many speakers are primarily English-speaking (Cahill, 2018). Today, through language workshops, camps, and use of language at tribal gatherings, Leonard (2008) considers the language a formerly sleeping language.

Today, the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma is a strong and vibrant sovereign nation headquartered in Miami, Oklahoma. Currently, the population is just over 5,000 members and is consistently growing as individuals continue to reconnect with their ancestry. Members reside in 47 states as well as in countries outside the United States. However, tribal members are clustered in three main areas that reflect our personal history as a community. Those clusters are in northern Indiana, eastern Kansas, and northeastern Oklahoma. Originally, the Miami tribe inhabited what is now known as Indiana, Illinois, Ohio, Wisconsin, and Michigan. The lands in Oklahoma include a 1,400-acre land base and many tribal businesses in and around Miami. The tribe is able to maintain the necessary resources to sustain the elderly and young people. We share a common history with our ancestors, but continue to evolve in the present moment based on the demands placed upon us. We make choices that allow us to live on the foundation of our ancestors, and aid in the process of living well (Ironstrack, 2012). With this historical background in mind, next I will talk about the *myaamia* values that serve as a grounding point for living well.

Myaamia Value System

In conceptualizing what it means to live well for *myaamia* people, it is important to also recognize the value system that drives the behaviors and ways of understanding the

world for *myaamiaki*. This is important because this is the filter or the lens through which I am understanding and contextualizing my results (Saldaña, 2015). There are eight specific values that make up the *myaamia* value system. While they are naturally evolutionary because of the fluid changes on both the community and individual levels, these values do make up an implicit framework for how humans (particularly *myaamia*) are supposed to be. Intrinsic within these values is an interconnectedness that links each value to the others, forming a web of understanding that guides the proper ways of interacting with the world from a *myaamia* perspective. These values are not typically taught explicitly, but rather they emerge through implicit messages within educational efforts, storytelling, interactions as a community, and at times through trial and error. The image of a *wiikiaami* ‘lodge’ of the *myaamia* people best helps to illustrate the supportiveness, protection, and nurture that are provided by these values. The information in this section stems from a presentation by Ironstrack and Baldwin (2008) at Miami University.

Structure. This *wiikiaami* ‘lodge’ is a term that today is used to describe the homes *myaamia* people historically lived in. They were built as a means of protection for the family and a location to nurture children. *Wiikiaami* were a place in which intergenerational narratives would be shared, contributing to the passing down of knowledge, wisdom, and *aalhsookana* or ‘Winter Stories.’ The frame of the *wiikiaami*, called *mantepwayi*, is intended to support individuals, families, and the community. This support is intended to be flexible. Because the framework is made up of saplings, it can be bent and stretched in ways that make sense for the particular *wiikiaami* being built. In similar ways, our value system is intended to be flexible so as to support the needs of the community at any given time. Throughout generations, a particular value may not be as important as it once was,

potentially leading to a change in the values that make up the system. Both the *mantepwayi* and the value system are intended to withhold external pressure to stand up for and protect the community in times of need.

In addition, the *mantepwayi* is built by bending the saplings and anchoring them into the ground, creating a dome-like structure (see Figure 2). In similar ways, our knowledge system is inherently tied to and grounded in our landscape or *myaamionki* ‘myaamia land.’ One of the greatest sources of knowledge for our people is our ecological surroundings and we, as a community, understand that is important for our survival as a people. Furthermore, the *mantepwayi* can be covered with any number of materials including plastic tarps, smoked canvas, cattail mats, or even bark from trees. However, the skin covering the *mantepwayi* is not what is important, but rather the structure underneath. In a similar way, these values are intended to provide support and guidance for individuals’ behavior and decision-making. When presented formally, this structure is depicted without the coverings. The parallel to today is often unspoken, but clear to those who are striving to learn: though *myaamia* people do not dress as our ancestors did in 1790s or 1840s, we remain *myaamia* because we stuck together through difficult times, maintained a core set of values, and continue to strive together to revitalize our community’s web of knowledge.

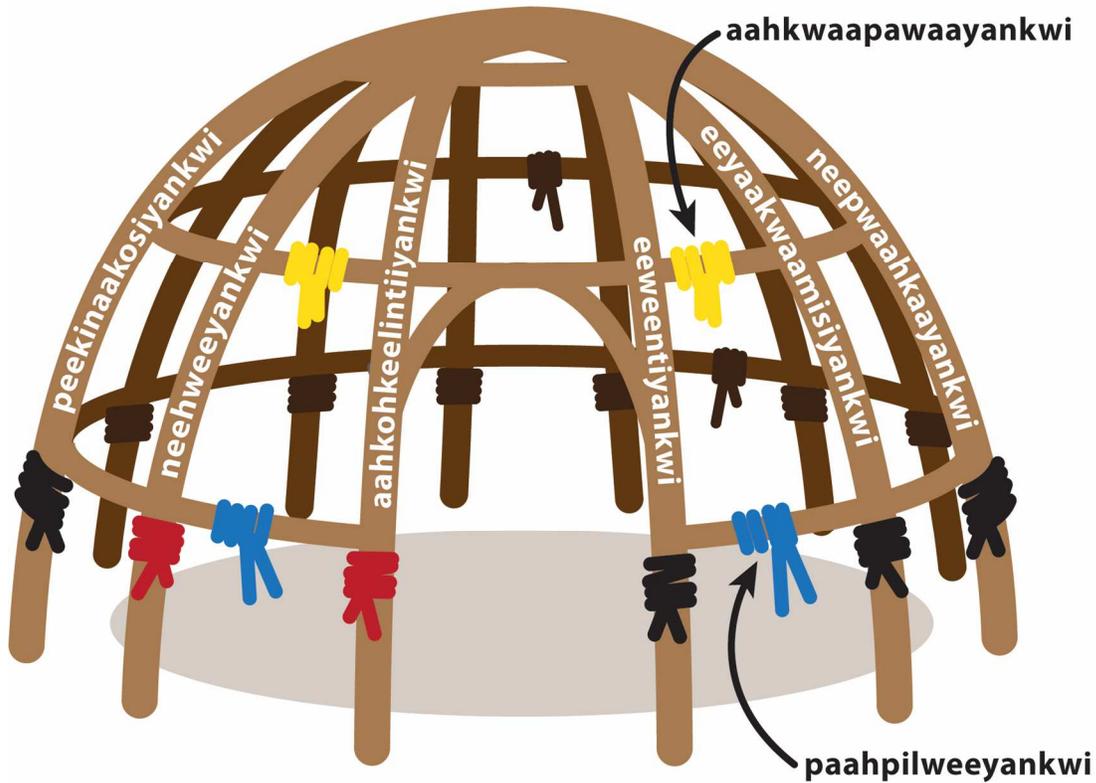


Figure 2. *mantepwayi* 'lodge frame' as a representation of the Miami value system

Note: Illustration by Carole Katz, Myaamia Center, Miami University

In order to strengthen this metaphor, extending the *mantepwayi* to the value system, it is important to understand the purpose of the eight poles that make up that structure. More specifically, there is an organizational structure for the *mantepwayi* in which different saplings or poles are carefully chosen to provide different levels of stability and security for the *wikiami* as a whole. Similarly, there are various values within this system that provide different levels of support and stability for people across time. The first four vertical poles are the foundations of the value system (and the *wikiaami*) and are considered more stable across time, as evidenced by their presence in stories both past and present. These values are seen to be more foundational and secure, as they have emerged over time through generations of evolving wisdom. These foundations have allowed *myaamiaki* to survive and

strengthen over time. These four poles are represented by the color black which represents the North, the winter season, elders, waning physical strength, and wisdom. Subsequently, there are two vertical poles that provide strength and the most support for the structure and are represented by the color red. Red is chosen to represent the West, strength, sacrifice, adults, and a sense of vitality. Then, there are two poles that run horizontally around the structure, and while they are smaller, weaker, and more flexible, they provide a stabilization for the *mantepwayi*. The first horizontal pole is designated the color blue and represents the South and our tribal youth. The last pole is the color yellow and represents the East as well as our infants or those just born. Ultimately, the various poles that make up the *mantepwayi* work together to make up the strongest possible structure for *myaamiaki*.

Description of Values. The four foundational poles, represented by the color black, identify values that are general descriptions of how we interact with other *myaamia* people and the world (see Table 1). The first of the four central values is *neepwaahkaayankwi*, which means ‘we are wise, conscious, aware.’ This awareness of one’s surroundings stems from a communal desire to know the reason that things are the way they are. Within *myaamia* culture, there is a constant drive to gain wisdom with age that comes through one’s lived experiences. These experiences allow us to integrate our previous knowledge and current situations in order to expand *myaamia* ways of knowing the world. Historically, this general curiosity and awareness of surroundings is what provided resilience in the face of adversity. The adaptive, flexible, and ever-expanding understanding of the world allows for the community to adjust to whatever circumstances might arise. This wisdom and awareness leads to a deep respect for and valuing of elders as they hold more life experiences, wisdom, and knowledge than those in younger generations. This concept of paying respect to the

elder generation for wisdom and knowledge is something that is taught from an early age, infancy even.

The second of the four foundational values is *eeyaakwaamisiyankwi* or ‘we strive for (something).’ *Myaamia* people have continually housed goals that push us to reach a desired place in life. While these goals aren’t always explicit that one is striving for, this allows us to progress in appropriate ways that fosters resilience within our community. This value is inherent with the community’s desire to revitalize language and culture as we are continually striving to overcome the challenges of the past. *Myaamiaki* to this day strive to better the community through many different means.

The third foundational value is *eeweentiyankwi* or ‘we are related to each other.’ Many American Indian communities promote this concept of interrelatedness, but for *myaamia* people the relatedness specifically includes kinship relations, responsibilities to one another, and even feelings of gratitude and alliance. At the heart of this value lies the connection between individuals that connect us as living beings as well as the connections between *myaamia* people specifically. When a *myaamia* person introduces him- or herself to another *myaamia* person, it is important to discuss ancestors and the family line from which one comes from. This allows us to remind one another that we are related and to treat one another with the respect that is inherent in interconnection.

The fourth foundational value is *peehkinaakosiyankwi* ‘we are generous, kind.’ In particular, this is closely tied to the previous value as it is the core of interconnection and influences how we treat one another each and every day. Specifically, for the process living well at the core of this paper, if we are all related, then it is imperative to treat one another with kindness as hurting one person hurts us all as a community. *Myaamia* people know that

when we ask for something from someone else (in particular an elder), we give tobacco to that individual to recognize the wisdom they are sharing. We offer gifts as a means to show our gratitude and not simply because it is expected of one another.

Next, there is a second group of values that is represented by the color red (see Table 1) and are focused on skills that *myaamia* people strive to have, meaning these are more explicit behaviors that *myaamia* people engage in as a sense of responsibility to the community. These include *aahkokeelintiyankwi* or ‘we care for each other’ and *neehweeyankwi* or ‘we speak well.’ In particular, these values represent the responsibilities that accompany adulthood and providing for the community. In the process of providing for the community in effective ways, it is important to engage with the world such that they think about others before themselves as well as speak in ways that bring pride to the community. These are quite difficult skills that require an individual to have learned how to be disciplined and to be aware enough to understand the needs of the community as a whole. Caring for both the youth and elders is the responsibility of the adults and has always been this way. Our words are also important and make a reflection on both our families and ourselves. This is important especially among our leaders who choose words in order to maintain peace.

The final two values reflect the fun nature and mental freedom of *myaamia* people. These values include *paahpilwaayankwi* or ‘we joke, are humorous’ and *aahkwaapawaayankwi* or ‘we dream’ and are represented by blue and yellow, respectively (see Table 1). Humor is one way to cope with the many stressors one experiences throughout his or her life. *Myaamia* people have a sense that there are many aspects of life that are out of our control and that humor is one way to help explain the lack of seriousness in our lives.

This humor also helps in all areas including living our daily lives, in the political process, and community dances. There are few domains where humor is restricted. In addition, dreaming was historically a task that is associated with youth. Historically, youth would fast, seek visions, and observe dreams in order to find a sense of purpose and direction in life. Dreams are associated with a freedom of thought, which is something that allows us as a people to continue to grow and strive to reach goals. Mental freedom is important to change and a vital source for new ideas and new ways of expression that can be important to creating new strands of our web. Within the *mantepwayi* structure, these last two values are considered the smallest and weakest ribs - horizontal running poles - of the lodge frame. This representation with the elders as the foundation, the adults engaging in skills and providing for the community, and the youth utilizing humor and dreaming symbolizes the relationships between the old and the young. Without one of these portions, the others would lack the ability to be strong and pose challenges to the structure and threaten its ability to protect those living within it.

Table 1. *myaamia* values

Poles	Value	Translation	Example
North, Winter, Elders, Waning Physical Strength	Neepwaahkaayankwi	We are wise	Awareness and curiosity to “know the reason of things”
	Eeyaakwaamisiyankwi	We strive to get/attain something	No getting something for nothing
	Eeweentiyankwi	We are all related	Interrelation between all things – gratitude, alliance
	Peekinaakosiyankwi	We act in a generous manner	Help one another, warmth, welcoming, nurturing, supportive

Table 1. (continued)

West, strength, sacrifice, vitality, adults	Aahkohkeelintiiyankwi	We care for each other	Responsibility to protect and provide for community
	Neehweeyankwi	We speak well	Speak in ways that bring pride and dignity to community (disciplined) “we choose our words carefully so as not to offend” (Little Turtle)
South, youth	Paapilweeyankwi	We joke	Use of humor to alleviate stress, tension, and to express new ideas
East, birth	Aahkwaapawaayankwi	We dream	Freedom of thought, future-thinking

Relation to Current Study. The way the community understands the mechanism for transmission of these values is through our educational efforts. Current educational efforts include our summer youth programs (*eewansaapita* and *saakaciweeta*), courses at Miami University, and workshops in various parts of the community. I would like to offer that our community stories provide a particular type of education and are an efficient means of transmission of these values, due to the content of the stories as well as the process of storytelling. The content of *myaamia* stories portray many *myaamia* values through the actions of the characters. All of the values emerge out of the stories at some point, but for the sake of this paper, I will offer an example using a *Wiihsakacaakwa* story. The value of *peekinaakosiyankwi* ‘we act in a generous manner’ emerges from “The *Wiihsakacaakwa* Story” narrated by *kiišikohkwa*, or Elizabeth Vallier (Costa, 2010, pp. 114-129). In this story, *Wiihsakacaakwa* visits many of his relatives including *oonsaanikwa* ‘Fox Squirrel,’ *mahkwa* ‘Bear,’ *kwaahkwa* ‘Woodpecker,’ and *amehkwa* ‘Beaver.’ Each of these friends offers up food for *Wiihsakacaakwa* and his family. Ultimately, it is *Wiihsakacaakwa*’s greed

and inability to return such generosity that gets him into trouble. However, each of these characters demonstrates an enormous amount of generosity and caring for *Wiihsakacaakwa*. While this is a surface-level understanding of this story's complex messages, the value system clearly emerges from the content of the story. In addition, *myaamia* people also engage in particular ways at our storytelling events so as to live out our values. For example, the simple act of telling our stories in a particular, well-rehearsed manner portrays *neehweeyankwi* or 'we speak well.' Our storytellers are specifically chosen so as to portray the stories in a particular manner. To many *myaamia* people, the internalization of these small processes leads to the internalization of our value system. As such, it is important to understand these values anytime we attempt to understand the meaning individuals gain from these stories. These values are the implicit messages that make up our understanding of living well.

Myaamia Concept of Living Well

Myaamia values inform the ways in which *myaamia* people interact with one another, make decisions about the world, and even how they take care of themselves and kin. Importantly, the knowledge system of *myaamia* people is even evident in the ways in which *myaamiaki* conceptualize health. Because this differs from the ways most studies discuss health within American Indian groups, it is first important to identify this understanding.

American Indian Health. Health is one of the most common topics discussed within the psychological literature surrounding American Indian people. Largely, this stems from the health disparities that exist between American Indians and the general United States population. Gone and Trimble (2012) conducted arguably the most comprehensive review of the prevalence rates of numerous mental health disorders in the American Indian population.

Specifically, they found that American Indians show higher rates of alcohol dependence, posttraumatic stress disorder, drug dependence, depression, and suicide than any other race in the United States. While this is a landmark review of mental health specifically, other examinations of broader depictions of health within American Indian communities focus on suicide rates (Alcántara & Gone, 2007; Borowsky, Resnick, Ireland, & Blum, 1999; Herne, Bartholomew, & Weahkee, 2014; Shaughnessy, Doshi, & Jones, 2004), chronic illnesses (Mehl-Madrona, 1999), mental health concerns (Costello, Farmer, Angold, Burns, & Erkanli, 1997; Garrett, Baldrige, Benson, Crowder, & Aldrich, 2015), obesity (Halpern, 2007), alcoholism and drug use (Tingey et al., 2017), and domestic violence (Wahab & Olson, 2004) as some examples. Even those studies attempting to challenge the ways healthcare has been approached in the recent past first address the health disparities between AI's and the general US population (LaFromboise, Hoyt, Oliver, & Whitbeck, 2006; Zuckerman, Haley, Roubideaux, & Lillie-Blanton, 2004).

While these are necessary examinations of health and the “problem” must be understood before that problem can be fixed, this leaves out a large fraction of the narrative surrounding American Indian health. Many of these studies place health issues within the context of historical trauma, lack of mental health resources, as well as the difficulties in conducting research with this population, but they also place American Indians into a framework of health that (a) ignores the existing heterogeneity within the American Indian population and (b) contradicts the varying local knowledge systems. As an example of the promotion of homogeneity of American Indian peoples, Hodge, Limb, and Cross (2009) propose a shift from perceiving health from a “Western” tradition marked by colonization and oppression toward balance and harmony. At first glance and superficially, this challenge

is helpful for the field as it proposes moving away from having a Euro-centric view of health. However, it also places all American Indian people into one group and proposes a framework that the authors imply should work for all American Indian people. Similarly, Hodge and Nandy (2011) examine the predictors of wellness within an American Indian population. This study's inclusion criteria require individuals to identify as American Indian and do not report even asking for tribal affiliation, suggesting the authors are conceptualizing American Indian people as all the same. While it is possible that there are ethical considerations in reporting on this population (i.e., with so few people from a particular community, there is a risk of identifying individuals simply from reporting tribal affiliation), the report on these demographics perpetuate the examination of American Indians as one homogenous group of people. In addition, the investigators in this study asked for percent of American Indian blood in their demographic questionnaire. The reasons for this question were not reported, but demonstrates a racialized understanding that implies that there is a difference between those that have more than 50% American Indian blood and those that do not. Furthermore, King, Smith, and Gracey (2009) examine the "causes" of the health gap for indigenous people. Interestingly, this study does address "notions of health, illness, and healing" and situates this in the *Anishinabek (Ojibway)* conceptualization of health, they continue to utilize the phrase "indigenous health" throughout, generalizing their discussion to all indigenous people (e.g., identifying mainly indigenous people of North America, but also drawing from indigenous people in New Zealand and Australia). While all of these papers have many strengths, together they exemplify the homogenizing of American Indian peoples. Just as all Latina/o individuals do not experience the world the same because of origins in different countries and cultures, American Indians also do not experience the world the same. There

are 567 distinct federally recognized tribes, all with their own cultures and ways of understanding the world (Bureau of Indian Affairs, 2017). As such, it is important when conducting research within this population to situate the people within their particular knowledge system(s).

In addition to treating all American Indian people the same, another issue with the literature surrounding health within American Indian communities is that the ways in which many studies conceptualize, operationalize, and measure health do not fit with local communities' perceptions of health. The definition of health in many of these studies largely ignores the ways in which these communities understand health for themselves. For example, in addition to not situating the study within a particular American Indian community, Hodge and Nandy (2009) utilize measures that contradict their overall definition of wellness. The paper describes wellness for American Indians as "signifying more than the absence of disease; it is the balance of environmental traits that together maintain good health status," (p. 791). However, they proceed to describe measures of wellness status, general health status, obesity status (measured by BMI), health conditions (identifying health conditions like type 2 diabetes), high-risk behaviors, limitation in activities, and history of neglect and abuse. The authors do not make an attempt to measure the environmental traits that maintain good health as they identified in their definition. It would be more beneficial generally to situate the concept of health locally from the particular group the study is examining, provide a definition and operationalization of health from that community's perspective, and provide congruent measurements based on that definition. While this is a more difficult approach to understanding health for various communities, it is the route that would best serve those communities long-term.

Few examinations of health in AI communities utilize a strengths-based approach to determine the positive determinants of health within this population or attempt to explain what health is within the context of the particular culture (Graham & Stamler, 2010). The current paper attempts to situate the concept of wellness within a cultural context, namely *myaamia* storytelling, in order to promote wellness rather than overcome adversity. Though a small change, Psychologists who utilize strengths-based approaches (see below for further information on strengths-based approaches) have noted that a promotion of growth and bringing one closer to their “goal” state is a more optimal promotion of health than overcoming problems in a community. As such, I will continue to discuss the ways in which *myaamia* people understand “health.”

Myaamia Living Well. *Myaamia* people historically and contemporarily understand “health” in ways that are not well-known within the psychological literature. More specifically, much current psychological research talks about health as a dichotomous outcome that can be achieved. One is either “healthy” or “unhealthy” in regards to various determinates of health. Fortunately, the academic community recognizes that there are various facets that make up one’s state of health or wellness, but those facets are still described within this dichotomy. Complementing this way of understanding health, *myaamia* people understand health as *nahi-mehtohseeniwinki* or “living well,” and this construct can be described as the integrated and fluid concept of interaction and responsibility between all aspects of health. The following description of living well and its’ components is derived from community based knowledge and analysis of *myaamiataweenki* ‘Miami language’ to aid in my understanding of the construct.

The first of the aforementioned aspects of health is *peelakioni* ‘health’ or physical wellness. More specifically, this is a lack of disease and thought of as being physically and mentally alive and having a well-functioning body. Additionally, there is *peehkisita manetoowa* ‘s/he has a good spirit’ which is the living force that travels beyond after the body dies. Nurturing the spirit is often personal and private and connected to realms of existence and understanding. For this reason, the methods for nurturing the spirit are not proscribed by the community. Next is *neehiteeheyoni* ‘a good mind, sensible, wise’ and is a mental state of being that is pleasing to others and demonstrates security in one’s mental space and knowledge. These three components make up what we might today call physical, spiritual, and mental health in English.

Living well is a generalized concept that merges the physical, mental, and spiritual health of individual Myaamia learners into a refined context of communal interaction. The Myaamia community and understanding of living well becomes stronger as a safe and supportive space in which all individuals expression of knowing, sharing, and experiencing can be expressed. It is believed that the creation of such a safe space is how youth will be able to best gain knowledge, security, and stability to create their own living well experience that enables the passing on of knowledge to meet community needs. Therefore, the more generalized notion of living well is a community collective of individual paths of learning and sharing that are woven together into a cultural community context that is framed by Myaamia ways of knowing, understanding and expression. Living well is a process of continual internalization that strengthens over time through awareness, acceptance, and ability to learn from all lived experiences.

It is important that this is not defined for individuals, but emerges out of experiences that individuals might have. For example, one realm of living well for *myaamia* people might be their engagement in tribal activities. Both historically as well as today it is important for *myaamia* people to be engaged in all of the varied activities, community events, and opportunities the tribe provides. Rather than indicating the dichotomous status of the individual (i.e., “healthy” or “unhealthy” levels of engagement) using a subjective and relatively varied understanding of what that means, we know that individuals can make daily (even hourly) decisions to engage in behaviors that promote engagement. This takes the person away from the all-or-nothing thought process that the dichotomy inherently promotes. Rather, they can feel boosts in self-efficacy and engagement with every choice they make. At the same time, they are not required to be engaged in every single event in order to be healthy (although they would be welcomed and embraced if they did). Through a mindful awareness of their own process of living well (another value according to the *myaamia* value system; see *mantepwayi* section above), the person is able to live a life they feel a sense of balance within. While the definition of what makes up “living well” is not yet fully developed, the focus of this dissertation is to see how community members interpret the impact of storytelling on living well generally from their own understanding of the concept.

Power of Narratives

The goal of this study is to examine how stories might form our value system, in particular, the concept of living well. While this hasn’t been done in this community, the benefits of narratives have been discussed within the larger literature. Next, I will discuss narratives more generally before returning to *myaamia* narratives, specifically. Because they serve many functions in communities (entertainment, relation of events, persuasion,

interpretation, description, and much more), they are powerful means of communication. In addition, narratives are highly accessible to audiences, do not require literacy, and are low-tech, ultimately contributing to their ability to be transmitted to large audiences (Senehi, 2002). In the literature, nine general benefits to narratives have been discussed: passing on knowledge, forming one's identity, learning socialization skills, increasing emotional intelligence, promoting morality, understanding time, locating and navigating geographic space, improving cognitive capacities, and promoting resilience (Senehi, 2002; Mar, 2004).

First, narratives aid in the transmission of knowledge in an efficient manner. Saddam and Yahya (2015) suggest that oral storytelling can be utilized for passing down academic as well as other forms of knowledge. While there are many forms that narratives can take, including scripts, personal narratives, and stories, each narrative has a different purpose. Scripts are used to explain and direct actions, personal narratives are used to share past experiences with others, and stories are used to tell a chronological episode of events. However, regardless of the intended purpose, they all pass along knowledge in their own right (Hudson, Shapiro, McCabe, & Peterson, 1991). Anecdotally, some individuals report learning everything they know through narrative forms because they believe that knowledge, learning, and life are all interconnected (Eder, 2007). More specifically, even within a particular cultural group, norms that are conveyed through language allow for the contesting of meaning from that particular knowledge system (Senehi, 2002). It is required for an individual who is conveying a narrative to know the information they are recanting well enough for others to unravel meaning from that narrative (Hudson, et al., 1991). Upon learning a narrative, the individual gains a different level of understanding of that information and they can tell it in different ways so as to transmit different meanings or

interpretations. Accordingly, both the information being presented in a narrative as well as the manner in which a narrative is told conveys culturally specific knowledge.

Second, narratives also serve to formulate and allow for the expression of identity. Communities and individuals utilize narrative formats to share their own experiences both in emotional and intellectual ways (Senehi, 2002). Fivush and Merrill (2016) suggest that narratives influence psychosocial development, namely the construction of familial and personal identities. Narratives that are passed down from parent to child or from grandparent to grandchild serve as a manual for who that child is. This process helps adolescents to develop their own identity. Ultimately, children learn who they are as a person based, in part, on the narratives they hear from others and, more importantly, those they tell themselves. As an example of this identity formation process, Carsten (2006) suggests that Silko's entire purpose in her book "Storyteller" is to position her identity as a Laguna person. The entire novel is the reappropriation of Native American identity that was previously taken away from her. In other words, the content of her story conveys her identity formation process. Additionally, during the process of reading this novel, an individual can learn how the stories can contribute to their own identity. Therefore, not only does the content of the story promote the formation of identity, but the process of reading the novel can aid an individual in forming their own identity.

Third, storytelling aids in learning socialization skills for many people. From a young age and across many cultures, narratives that individuals hear include a process of how to interact in a proper way (Miller, Wiley, Fung, & Liang, 1997; Senehi, 2002). In a study by Miller and colleagues (1997), researchers analyzed naturally occurring stories within middle-class Taiwanese and European American families. The stories were analyzed

for content (topics of stories), function (use in changing current behavior), and structure (how the story ends including attributes of a child or didactic material). Findings suggest that storytelling overlaps between these cultures the most with regards to the function of storytelling. Both Taiwanese and European American families use storytelling in order to modify the behavior of children, most notably with regards to socialization behaviors. However, the means for socializing the children was different; Chinese families were more likely to use storytelling to convey morals within social situations, whereas European American families told stories of affirmation to socialize. As such, socialization is conveyed in stories cross-culturally, but the means through which that is achieved might differ. People tell stories to show how others who have been through a situation before how they were able to get out of the situation they are in, often through practices of socialization (Saddam & Yahya, 2015). Most frequently, these types of stories teach people not to be isolated and to reach out to others for help in the face of problems. In sum, stories help individuals to learn the process through which we should socialize with others in a culturally normed manner as well as during difficult times.

Fourth, stories also help to teach emotional intelligence. Parents, particularly mothers, who have a more elaborative storytelling style, have children who tend to have better emotion regulation skills (Fivush, Marin, McWilliams, & Bohanek, 2009; Laible, 2004). In addition, Fivush, Haden, and Reese (2006) found that young children then use narratives to tell their personal experiences, understand themselves, as well as to regulate their emotions. Therefore, a process can be inferred in which the parent elaborately conveys emotions in their storytelling leads to an internalization of the process through which children can regulate their emotions. Eder (2007) proposes that stories inherently contain a

particular amount of emotion within them that increases one's ability to remember the information. Anecdotally, Eder indicated that Navajo people knew that emotionally charged situations are what help us to remember, leading to the use of exaggerated emotion in storytelling. While this promotes the retention of the information in the stories, it also makes emotional reactions (how to react in a proper way) more obvious, allowing for personal comparison to the characters in the story. In essence, narratives have the ability to teach individuals about emotions and emotion regulation, leading to emotional intelligence.

Fifth, narratives frequently include lessons in morality, teaching "how things should be" and implying what is right and wrong (Eder, 2007). While this might be interpreted differently by different people, narrative storytelling is often the preferred method for teaching these morals (Senehi, 2002). In some communities, this is a strong belief and one storyteller even said, "if my children hear the stories they will grow up to be good people; if they don't hear them, they will turn out to be bad" (Toelken & Tacheeni, 1981, p. 102). Within these narratives, the primary method for teaching the morals is by hearing about others' failures. Through gaining an understanding of when someone else did something "wrong" an individual can know how to do the "right" thing without having to directly experience negative events. Ultimately, storytelling aids in an individual's vicarious learning of morality.

Sixth, time travel becomes possible with narrative practices. Narratives disrupt the linearity of time as they are most often about past or fictional experiences. Through stories, people are able to visit the past and the future, which can often be indistinguishable, leading them to understand the self or present experiences through the transcendence of time (Senehi, 2002). Furthermore, many stories do not have a linear structure and the plot happens in a

cyclical nature. Events and actions that happened at different times may be presented as occurring simultaneously for a particular purpose (i.e., to teach a moral lesson; Eder, 2007). This makes it more powerful because people see how others' past experiences might influence their present moment and gain knowledge to use in their life. Brockmeier (2002) claims "narrativity allows humans to grasp a longer past and a more intricately conceived future, as well as a more variegated social environment" (p. 27). In sum, narratives allow individuals to perceive concepts from the past and the future in order to apply it in a meaningful way to their present experiences.

Seventh, place is an important aspect of many narratives. Across some cultures, stories are strongly tied to place for specific reasons. In particular, Native cultures are tied to place as a respect for the land is a crucial component of many indigenous cultures. Often, cultural significance is tied to particular places and one can determine the norms of a culture based on the relationship between the characters and their natural environment (Senehi, 2002). Silko (1996) discusses how place is always the central aspect of stories in the Pueblo tradition. In particular, they always talk about the landscape – which includes "the land, the sky, and all that is within them" (p. 267). Feld and Basso (1997) deconstruct notions of space and place that emerge from various viewpoints and differ based on positions of power and worldview. However, they importantly note that stories contain notions of place that are important to the culture those stories belong to. These stories containing place are rooted in social life, identity, politics, and interconnectedness with said place. As such, geography, space, or place is one of the most complex features of narratives.

Eighth, while the aforementioned benefits are subjectively culturally-bound, they also promote objective cognitive benefits. Mar (2004) argues that narratives are not only

beneficial for our health, but also necessary and outlines many models of the cognitive benefits of narrative comprehension. First, Kintsch's Construction-Integration model describes the process through which attempting to understand a narrative activates other stored knowledge within our memory. When we hear a word or a clause, anything that relates to that word or clause is automatically called into our working memory. Subsequently, those cues are held in working memory and are used to only strengthen and modify the existing knowledge, combining the current story with our past experiences. This process aids in one's ability to remember information about both the memory and the cue. In addition, constructionist models suggest that there is an integration mechanism that inhibits irrelevant information to the current context, leaving only the information that is important or may aid in comprehension to enter the working mental model. This process strengthens one's capacity for attention and aids in focus. Subjectively, Brockmeier (2002) suggests that narratives play an integral role in cultural memory because they combine cognitive functions, social implications, and emotional reactions simultaneously. This complex experience, rooted in context, creates strong and substantial cultural memories through the process of storytelling.

Lastly, narratives themselves promote resilience. Frequently, narratives recount experiences that are traumatic or distressing in nature. While this requires the teller and listener to experience uncomfortable emotions, this helps the teller to demonstrate their resilience in a cohesive manner and also helps listeners to vicariously develop resilience. Based on the extant research on resilience, the process of narration promotes many of the factors that lead to resilience including introspection, interpersonal connectedness, finding the positive in negative situations, and hardiness. As such, the simple act of relating to a

narrative can lead to individuals developing and implementing factors that promote resilience (East, Jackson, O'Brien, & Peters, 2010). Therefore, it is important to understand how the narrative process benefits resilience in culturally-specific contexts.

In sum, both the process of narration and narratives themselves have many benefits on both the individual and community level. It is important to note that these benefits are often interconnected as well. For example, stories that include descriptions of place also contain notions of identity, promotion of knowledge, and even intense emotional states in one. Individuals who listen to these stories are able to experience these benefits simultaneously and, through introspective processes, are able to pull out these lessons individually. This creates a complex process of continual self- and other-reflection through the lens of these narratives and stick with the individual throughout their ongoing life experiences. In effect, when stories “hit home” with an individual, it can be a powerful and life-changing experience that will shape that person’s worldview. This, in and of itself, makes narratives, and the valuing of cultural narratives, a necessary intervention for the promotion of community wellness. With this general understanding of the importance of storytelling, it is also important to understand more about indigenous storytelling specifically.

Indigenous Storytelling

Though narratives generally have benefits for all people, they are also culturally bound entities. Indigenous peoples have a strong foundation in storytelling processes, with many distinct purposes for those stories. While, for the purposes of this section, I am speaking with regards to indigenous storytelling, it is important to note that every Native community has their own storytelling traditions. As such, it is nearly impossible to make

broad generalizations and the information presented here is a starting point for understanding how indigenous storytelling differs from what Americans consider storytelling. Additionally, the stories within many indigenous groups are thought of as real; Iseke and Brennus (2011) suggests that “we can understand them as true pedagogic spaces. In stories we create meaning” (p. 14). As such, these stories are important and should be approached with much respect when discussed in a public space such as this dissertation.

Eder (2007) explains that indigenous stories differ from those of what many refer to as “Anglo stories,” in many ways. One difference that is obvious to novice listeners of indigenous stories is the cyclical structure of the stories. The stories do not have a clear beginning, middle, and end, but rather events happen with no relation to a set point in time. There are particular points in an indigenous story that might be repeated to convey an important message or lesson. In addition, the lessons learned from the stories occur throughout the story as opposed to the conclusion like many American stories (Eder, 2007). Furthermore, Iseke and Brennus (2011) suggest that indigenous stories convey a broader understanding of identity in relation to the cycle of life, the natural world, the community and the Nation. In particular, these relationships are all interconnected as opposed to being distinct features. Lastly, many of the stories that indigenous people tell are only told at certain times of the year out of respect for the characters in the stories (who are also real people) as well as to instill a sense of time in the community (Eder, 2007). For *myaamiaki*, it is important to tell our winter stories only beginning with *teekwahkahki* or ‘the killing frost’ in late fall and ending with the arrival of *ciinkwiaki* or ‘thunder beings’ in the spring (see more in *myaamia aalhsoohkaana* below; Costa, 2010). These differences are key to indigenous storytelling, but make it difficult to understand the stories for those not as well-

versed in this style of storytelling. Therefore, the following section will outline the key goals of storytelling within many indigenous groups.

Key Characteristics of Indigenous Storytelling. Storytelling within indigenous communities has many purposes that are often tribe-specific. Each tribe or nation has particular customs and rules regarding the way stories are told. For example, some are told only at particular time of year (like *myaamia aalhsoohkaana*), some are told only by particular individuals and are family “owned,” some are told in a public manner, and others are told only for particular groups (Archibald, 2008). As such, different scholars discuss indigenous storytelling in different ways. It is, therefore, important for individuals to become educated about tribal specific practices around storytelling prior to engaging in listening and interpretation for themselves. Importantly, are some common goals (arguably themes) that are inherent in many tribes’ stories which will be further discussed.

One very common and popular form of story that is told in many indigenous communities is that of the trickster. Tricksters are characters that are considered “ridiculous, imprudent, hilarious and mischievous [to the listener]” (Cidro, 2012, p. 27). Some claim that this character is intended to show that even those people who are considered an annoyance have purpose in our lives (Eder, 2007). However, Cidro (2012) indicates that the trickster for the *Anishnawbek* ‘Ojibway’ people represents the individual or the self, teaching lessons about one’s own behaviors, revealing both inadequacies as well as strengths. Because the trickster often fails, individuals learn about the consequences of particular behaviors and important ways of handling setbacks in life. These lessons convey an important message of balance; in addition to having positive experiences, there will always be negative ones. The

trickster helps us, as humans, come to terms with our own identity, in whatever way that manifests.

Humor is another feature that appears in indigenous stories. While the use of humor is used in the aforementioned trickster stories, this feature can be found in other types of stories as well. Gross (2002) discusses the use of humor in *Anishinaabe* stories in particular. It is emphasized that the use of humor in these stories drastically influences the worldview of *Anishinaabe* people. He explores the use of humor as a means to bridge traditional and modern culture, for identity development, to lighten the tone of difficult stories, to develop relationships between characters (namely animal and human), to create a balance, to entertain, to cope with a difficult history, and to describe the “Indian way” based on nonhierarchical structures. In particular, Gross believes that humor serves the function to help individuals remember and continue to think about the lessons of a story long after it has been told. In the continuation of processing the lessons of stories, individuals are able to reaffirm their relationships with others and to connect with others despite the tribulations that life can bring (Iseke & Brennus, 2011). In sum, humor serves many purposes, but is generally a way that indigenous people tend to approach life and life situations.

Moreover, storytelling is also intended to pass along cultural knowledge and values from generation to generation. Many stories focus on the relationship with the environment, resources, ethical considerations, and other humans. The ways that the characters handle these situations teaches knowledge about how to exist in this world (Cidro, 2012). Elders are often the responsible parties for storytelling as they wish for their knowledge to continue to be lived out by their families (Iseke & Brennus, 2007). In one storyteller’s personal experience of becoming a storyteller and working closely with *Anishinaabe* elders to

appropriately handle the stories, Archibald (2008) posits that the stories themselves have critical information about plants, medicine, healing, ceremony, history, and daily living. These storylines are intricately weaved in particular ways so as to communicate a particular meaning or to transmit a particular morsel of knowledge. Knowledgeable and practiced storytellers will manipulate the stories in such a way so as to communicate particular information to the listeners (Cidro, 2012). As such, stories contain knowledge that is passed along both explicitly within the content of the story as well as implicitly through the performance and ordering of stories.

Another important, but difficult, goal of indigenous storytelling is to experiment with and to process the unknown. Archibald (2008) describes Louise Erdrich's exploration of the unknown in her novel *Tracks*. Ultimately, Archibald takes a semi-postmodern approach to the unknown, stating that no amount of detail can bring us closer to the truth, but that indigenous storytellers always attempt to understand the world. Basso (1979) similarly discusses the use of stories (and humor) to make sense of one important and offending unknown: the "Whiteman" through an ethnographic approach to examining Western Apache storytelling. When indigenous people do not understand or lack knowledge about a particular realm of their environment, stories are used to fill the gaps. Stories can also be used to make a critique of the social environment. These stories can be modified and are malleable to reflect accurate stories when new knowledge is gained. However, this is one way that indigenous people "play" with their environments and understandings of how the world functions.

Lastly, it is important to note that the understanding of stories can evolve over time. The meaning of a story may be a result of not only the content, how the story is told (i.e., the

performance) but also the person's experience with the story (e.g., repeated exposures) (Archibald, 2008). Furthermore, within the *myaamia* community, the stories are not necessarily intended to be understood in a particular way, but rather interpreted based on one's point of view and life experiences. The way one person interprets a story may not be the same as another person *or* as they way they will interpret the story in two years. As such, it can be important to revisit stories throughout the course of one's life in order to further one's understanding and conceptualization of the knowledge and life lessons embedded within them.

Myaamia Stories

Storytelling for *myaamia* people is a way of life. In Costa's (2010) edition of the *myaamia* storybook, Daryl Baldwin offered an introduction in which he explains "to tell stories, as our people have always done, is to remember. To create new stories is to grow and continue remembering," (p. xvi.). As such, storytelling is the means through which *myaamia* people continue the traditions of our ancestors and to pay respect to them. At the same time, these stories offer sources of wisdom, knowledge, values, and general entertainment. These stories, as Baldwin suggested and similar to our value system, are intended to be flexible in nature and changing with the inherent changes that take place within our community. It is important, however, to differentiate between the two types of *myaamia* stories: *aalhssohkana* 'Winter Stories' and *aacimoona* 'Historical Narratives.'

Myaamia aalhssohkana 'Winter Stories.' *Aalhssohkana*, often translated as 'sacred story,' are those stories that are only told during the winter time. *Myaamia* people begin telling them with *teekwahkahki* or 'the killing frost' in late fall and end with the arrival of *ciinkwiaki* or 'thunder beings' in the spring (Costa, 2010). These stories frequently

involve characters such as *manetoowa* ‘other-than-human being’ or animals. In addition, these stories contain multiple episodes that focus around the same character or theme. More specifically, they are constructed in this way intentionally so that the storyteller is free to use his or her own discretion in the ordering of the episodes. For example, stories of *wihsakacaakwa* (an important *myaamia* “hero”) tend to begin with this character either living at or traveling in a particular location. After the story unfolds, it ends with him traveling to another unknown location. This fluid structure of a typical episode enables the storyteller to easily and intentionally weave together particular stories to communicate a message to the listener(s). Moreover, the stories are often placeless, meaning they do not mention a specific location, but rather aspects of landscape to link with *myaamia* place identity (Shoemaker, 2008). Today, *aalhsoohkana* are told both formally and informally in large and small groups. Ultimately, they allow *myaamia* people to transcend time and learn lessons passed down from generations.

Aacimoona, on the other hand, are historical narratives that can be told at any point in time. They tend to involve specific people and places, in the form of personal life stories. Over time, anthropologists and linguists (both professional and amateur) have recorded these stories from *myaamia* people. Also differing from *aalhsoohkana*, *aacimoona* have a particular order and do not allow for the fluidity previously described. It is important to keep these stories in order to be able to remember these events accurately (Shoemaker, 2008). However, the storyteller is able to incorporate these amongst the *aalhsoohkana* in order to strengthen the message being sent in the sequence of stories told.

Storybook. In 2010, the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma released a publication that was a collection of stories that had been gathered from the mid 1890’s through 1916. This

publication was edited and translated by David Costa, a linguist who has been studying the *myaamia-peoria* language since 1988 and has worked extensively with *myaamiaki* since 1995. Costa worked on these stories for over 20 years as none of the individuals who recounted the stories had an understanding of the language. Therefore, he worked extensively to re-write the stories based on his vast knowledge of the language. This is the first collection of written native texts from the *myaamia* and Peoria people.

The publication includes 45 texts, 16 of which are written only in the English language and 29 are written in either *myaamia*, Peoria, or Wea as well as English. The text includes origin and culture hero stories, trickster stories (several of fox and wolf), animal stories, biographical narratives, autobiographical and historical narratives, how-to stories, and Christian prayers. They are intended to be used for learning the language, reclaiming *myaamia* culture and language, as well as gaining insight into the lives of *myaamia* people. Before this, *myaamia* stories had been told orally, but this was the first-time people who had little-to-no contact with storytellers could learn and tells the stories themselves.

It is believed that these stories were left behind intentionally for the tribe as a means of passing along knowledge that the community gained through important events (removal, for example). In leaving these stories behind for future generations, *myaamia* ancestors were preserving the vast experiences and life lessons learned through these important events. When they are told years after the events took place, individuals are able to combine their understandings of history, *myaamia* culture, and contemporary issues to learn lessons about the world. In this case, the experienced listener (one who has been exposed to stories throughout their life) to transcend time because these stories link them to the events, ideas, and beliefs that have been cultivated across many generations. When a *myaamia* person

hears these stories in their homes, at *myaamia* events, and with their relations, it gives a deeper meaning to their lives and personal connections. As such, this document marked an important milestone for *myaamia* people and continues, to this day, to serve as an important reminder of our resilience.

Character of wiihsakacaakwa. The character of *wiihsakacaakwa* shows up time and again in *myaamia* stories. In fact, our storybook's first passage includes a quote about this hero figure (quoted at the beginning of the introduction; Costa, 2010). There are few resources that discuss this character (or even similar characters from tribes that speak related languages) in an academic format. This paucity of resources reflects the values of *myaamiaki* and the desire to maintain the oral tradition as a cultural practice. However, there are two exceptions: one chapter by David Costa (2004) in a book entitled "Algonquian Spirit: Contemporary Translations of the Algonquian Literatures of North America" as well as Scott Shoemaker's dissertation in 2011. In this piece, Shoemaker discusses the narrative space or landscape that is created through storytelling within *wiihsakacaakwa* stories in particular. He indicates that *myaamiaki* have used stories to respond to colonial oppression as well as a means to uphold a relationship with the land itself. Therefore, it is important to keep in mind such a landscape when having any discussion of *myaamia* stories. As such, the following description of *wiihsakacaakwa* is based on my experiences as a lifetime listener (albeit a short one), of *myaamionki* 'Miami land,' and of these stories.

Wiihsakacaakwa stories are not necessarily single "stories" but rather fluid scenes that can be assembled in particular ways to send particular messages. These stories are also found in the storytelling of neighboring tribes, namely the Fox and Kickapoo (Costa, 2004). Primarily, *wiihsakacaakwa* is a cultural hero figure and is also known as a trickster. If one

asked any given *myaamia* person who he is, it is my experience that 9 out of 10 would laugh before answering. *Wiihsakacaakwa* stories teach using humor, helping us to see that we can laugh at life's farces and can learn from experiences that, at first, seem impossible. As previously mentioned, *myaamia* stories are not intended to mean the same thing to every person. As such, any given person will give a different response as to who *wiihsakacaakwa* is. However, he is often thought of as a representation of *mihtohseenia*, or 'human'. He represents humanity and the balance of good and bad that exists in all of us.

Wiihsakacaakwa exists everywhere, is always on the go and is consistently getting into trouble. Interestingly, *wiihsakacaakwa* frequently transforms the self by assuming the identity of other humans or animals in order to trick them, often for selfish reasons.

Shoemaker argues that he is often going against the natural boundaries that exist in our world – those of space, balance, and reciprocity (Shoemaker, 2011). This fluidity with which his character embodies enables each person to take meaning out of the wholesome, the evil, the ordinary, and the feats of strength that he often exhibits. I, personally, enjoy imagining *wiihsakacaakwa* as a woman and the implications that would bring with it. However, it is precisely for these reasons that I am not defining the character *wiihsakacaakwa* here in this dissertation. It is important that I leave the actual meaning-making of this character to individuals within the community(ies) that tell stories of him. In sum, there is no one succinct method for describing *wiihsakacaakwa*, this character is best described as human.

Theoretical Underpinnings

While I have already discussed some of the benefits that narratives have on all humans and how they might play out within the *myaamia* community, the extant literature has not discussed the general processes that connect narratives to wellness. As such, the

following section will provide an overview of three general psychological theories that help to explain this process. More specifically, here I will outline some of the relevant principles from Ecological Systems Theory, Social Learning Theory, and Resilience Theory.

Ecological Systems Theory. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory (EST) was developed to describe human development within the varied contexts in which an individual is embedded. Importantly, EST can help to explain how *myaamia* people might all interact within different "systems" but can ultimately live up to similar outcomes of living well. Because of *myaamiaki*'s history and current state of living in diaspora, there are many varied influences on different families and even individuals within the community. Our community embraces these influences as the skills and knowledge gained from outside sources contribute to our global knowledge system. However, it is important to recognize those forces that might string us together as a people across time and space. EST is a helpful theory in understanding how storytelling might be one of those important threads stringing us together and promoting living well.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) formulated EST to describe the development of humans that can be used to examine or explain many psychological phenomena (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014), developmental risk and protective factors (Hong & Garbarino, 2012; Monti, Pomerantz, & Roisman, 2014), engagement (Borrero & Yeh, 2016), family influences (Fivush & Merrill, 2016), and much more (Burns, Warmbold-Brann, & Zaslofsky, 2015; Kirk, Gallagher, Coleman & Anastasiow, 2011). Originally, EST conceptualized human development within a nested model of four structures, or systems that are nested around a focal individual like a set of concentric circles (see Figure 3). In describing this relationship, he uses the metaphor of a Russian *matryoshka* doll; each doll is

of a smaller size and is placed inside another, slightly larger, doll. Bronfenbrenner compares these dolls to each context an individual is embedded in. These systems include the chronosystem, macrosystem, exosystem, mesosystem, and microsystem that are all nested within the previous. This paradigm focuses on the relationship between the person and the contextual factors in each of the systems. This relationship allows for a regular reciprocal interaction between the person or biological factors (i.e., sex) and contextual or ecological factors (i.e., culture) that is progressively more complex across time (Trudge, Mokrova, Hatfield, & Karnik, 2009). This model also assumes a reciprocal relationship between the person and their environment in which the person is simultaneously shaped by and shaping their environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1995). As such, this paradigm helps to explain both individual differences between people as well as commonalities within a particular community.

Concentric systems. First, the microsystem is the system of connected factors (activities, social roles, interpersonal relations) that are experienced by the individual in a direct manner. These influences tend to be within the immediate environment of the individual. Examples of influencing factors within this system include family, friends, and school. Next, the mesosystem comprises the links between two or more microsystem-level settings containing the developing person. In many instances, there are various settings that an individual might be involved in and are not entirely independent of one another. For example, a child attending a public school might have parents who attend parent-teacher conferences. This interaction influences the development of the individual over time (Neal & Neal, 2013). Furthermore, the exosystem is similar in that it comprises the linkages between two or more settings and at least one of the settings does not include the individual. For

example, the parents' workplace, while not directly influencing the individual, might have an indirect impact on the child. Next is the macrosystem, or the system containing the culture or subculture of the individual. This might include various forms of knowledge, resources, customs, lifestyles, and general influences on the individual. Lastly, the chronosystem is a parameter around the environment of the individual. This system recognizes the passage of time and the change or consistency over time of the characteristics of the person as well as the environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Together, these concentric systems influence the person and can help to explain how individuals become who they are across time.

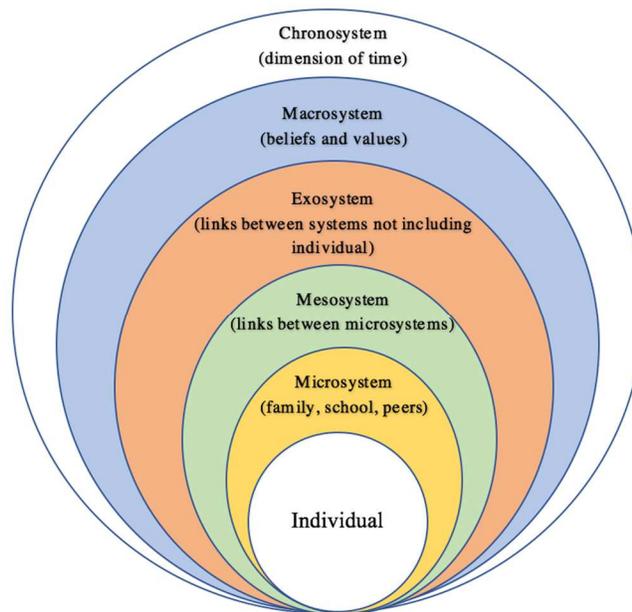


Figure 3. Ecological Systems Theory

Network model. While Bronfenbrenner's theory is a helpful tool for understanding variegated systems influencing individual development, other researchers have attempted to re-conceptualize Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory. Neal and Neal (2013) suggest that the various systems described by this theory do not interact as concentric circles

but rather are a network that interacts in overlapping, but distinct ways (see Figure 1). For example, these researchers suggest that the family microsystem is nested in the policy-making exosystem, but it is false to claim the family is a subset of those policies. Rather, the family and the policies interact through networks of interconnection. Notably, they argue that Bronfenbrenner himself discussed the importance of the interconnectedness of the model. Bronfenbrenner (1979) distinguished that microsystem analysis should take into account the indirect influence of third parties on the interactions between members of a dyad because dyadic relations ignores the wider context. As such, the network model proposed by Neal and Neal (2013) is useful with communities like *myaamiaki* because the contexts *myaamiaki* are embedded in interact with one another, but are not nested within one another.

Within this network model, Simmel's (1955) work on social circles is recognized and suggests that individuals engage in multiple social circles. When these circles are conceptualized as nested, this makes the assumption that the innermost circle is entirely connected with the outer circle. However, as previously noted, this isn't the case with all of the micro-level impacts on a person. As such, in understanding the relationships between the innermost and outermost circles, you must turn to the literature on social networks. EST assumes each of the contexts an individual is embedded within occurs within a particular setting or "a place where people can readily engage in face-to-face interaction" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; p. 22). However, setting assumes there are two dimensions, the spatial dimension and the interactional dimension. The spatial dimension, or the factors that make up each of the systems, is considered superior or more influential than the interactional dimension or the relationships between systems. Neal and Neal (2013), however, argue that interactions are not necessarily secondary to space and maybe even deserve more emphasis

because they make up one's existence. Upon switching from a nested model to a networked model, we can allow for independent but interconnected relationships between the contexts an individual engages in *and* the relationships between those contexts becomes the focal point.

This network model is particularly important for understanding *myaamia* people as many individuals within the community are engaged with other distinct communities as well. While *myaamia* people embrace the knowledge from other sources and seek to contribute to the global knowledge system, these communities are often not directly connected. As a personal example, I was engaged with my church community growing up and this was a part of my everyday experience. In addition, I was engaged with the *myaamia* community on a less regular basis. To suggest that my church relationships were encompassed within the *myaamia* culture would be false. The network model can help to conceptually explain the indirect interactions between these various contexts and systems that impact *myaamia* people.

In conclusion, ecological systems theory is a framework for understanding the current study as it helps to contextualize *myaamia* people's life influences. In examining the findings through an EST lens, it becomes possible to view storytelling as one thread that connects all of the life experiences in one's network of contextual influences. If an individual uses the messages of storytelling in their daily lives, this is important to note as it is both an indicator and the process of living well in action. A narrative account of the use of storytelling in his daily life was shared in Daryl Baldwin's introduction to the *myaamia* storybook. Daryl noted,

“The other day, I was walking from the barn to the house with my youngest daughter *Amehkoonsa*. A flock of geese flew over and we both looked up. At that spontaneous

moment I said: “*waapami. Wihsakacaakwa iisilenita.*” We both chuckled to each other. Later, I found myself thinking how that moment, as a parent and child, was for us the culmination of language, story, place and culture all merging together to give meaning to an experience that was uniquely *Myaamia*. Stories alone could not have afforded us this opportunity, but without them it would have been different,” (p. xvi).

While this story was told without awareness of this EST network model, it perfectly demonstrates how interactions with *myaamia* storytelling on varied levels of his life can interact in a powerful way, promoting living well. Storytelling, in particular, is one of the cultural threads that influences the decisions an individual either makes or chooses to not make in engaging in behaviors that promote living well. While this influence is likely considered within the macrosystem level, individuals who are engaged with the *myaamia* community on various levels might allow the implicit messages of living well to become internalized into their ways of knowing and promote more behaviors that enable them to live well.

Social Learning Theory. *Myaamia* people learn about the world in many ways, most notably for the purposes of this dissertation is through storytelling. Because *myaamiaki* are a community and kinship based people, learning from one another is an important part of the cultural practices. *Myaamiaki* learn the most about living well when gathering and interacting with one another. Interestingly, many of the proposed mechanisms for learning proposed by Bandura’s (1971) Social Learning Theory (SLT) can be extrapolated to the process of learning through storytelling. Storytelling helps *myaamia* people to learn not only by the simple absorption of information from those stories, but also through vicarious learning and observation, modeling, and through the use of reinforcements. These SLT components and how they might apply to *myaamia* storytelling will be further discussed in this section.

Cognitive component of learning. Bandura (1971) identified that there are two cognitive abilities that humans possess which enable them to learn information quickly. First, humans have an incredible capacity for cognitive control. This cognitive control can be thought of as the ability to process information and adapt one's thoughts from moment to moment, explaining the maintenance of or extinction of behaviors over time. One study by Grings and Lockhart (1963) attempted to demonstrate this cognitive control by determining whether individuals could reduce emotional reactions to conditioned stimuli. Researchers first conditioned a negative emotional response by pairing various geometric shapes with electric shocks. They then measured the participant's galvanic skin response to identify the participant's stress levels. After conditioning the automatic elevated galvanic skin response from the geometric shapes, the researchers attempted to extinguish the response, capitalizing on the participants' cognitive abilities. The researchers randomly assigned participants to either the experimental condition, in which participants were told there would no longer be a shock following the presentation of the geometric shapes, or the control condition, in which they were not instructed of this change. The researchers then collected three sets of "extinction trials" in which they did not administer a shock following presentation of the geometric shapes. Those individuals who were in the experimental condition demonstrated a significantly lower galvanic skin response than those individuals who were in the control condition across the three trials. This implies that the participants demonstrated cognitive control in preventing the elevated galvanic skin response that had been automatically conditioned. By the third extinction trial, the control participants also demonstrated an extinction of the conditioned response, but the experimental condition showed lower galvanic

skin responses across the three trials. Participants in the experimental condition were able to utilize their cognitive control to prevent their physiological response to stress.

This study, while seemingly unrelated to *myaamia* storytelling, has major implications for one's ability to engage in cognitive control over behaviors. This study demonstrates that individuals, with a small amount of information, can change the ways in which they react to or behave in particular situations. *Myaamia* people, by extension, can likely engage in cognitive control over the information they learn in stories to shape their behavior in other situations. They are able to cognitively learn the information that is pertinent to living well and simply engage in those behaviors immediately. This human capacity for cognitive control is beneficial and adaptive for *myaamiaki* in their process of learning how to live well.

Additionally, Bandura (1971) identified that humans have a superior cognitive capacity in which individuals are able to create mental representations of external factors as symbols and use those symbols to influence their future behavior. This indicates that, when hearing stories about how particular characters engage in living well, *myaamia* individuals are able to create representations of those characters (likely as representations of the self) and use those symbols to direct future behaviors. If those behaviors are promoting living well inherently, that will lead to the easy transition from the story to engaging in living well behaviors. However, even a message that is identified out of a story can be made into an external symbol and used for the adaptation into living well behaviors. Ultimately, the cognitive control and capacity for developing representations enables *myaamiaki* to cognitively adapt behaviors that promote living well and begin to engage in them in their daily lives.

Observation and vicarious learning. Bandura (1971) notes that cognitive abilities are important for understanding the processes through which humans learn behaviors. While the cognitive processes described previously describe why people learn, observation of others' behavior describes how individuals learn. Bandura identified that humans have the capacity for observation, which allows them to learn particular behaviors without the need for trial-and-error. He posits that even complex behaviors, with some regulation, can be learned through observational efforts. People must first attend to, and then retain the information they are learning by watching others. Upon watching others, they then use the information to reproduce the behavior in the self. This observation can be physically watching other people perform behaviors and then replicating that behavior or it could also be vicarious in nature. Vicarious learning is the learning that occurs through hearing about others' experiences and changing one's own behaviors through the experiences of the other person. While similar to observation, vicarious learning is observation of concepts rather than physically seeing the individual engage in the behavior. Either way, the individual is learning how to engage in particular behaviors without directly experiencing the event themselves.

As such, *myaamia* people are able to observe the proper behaviors through storytelling in two distinct ways. They can observe the behaviors of other individuals at the storytelling event to learn the proper behaviors contributing to living well. This observation promotes a thought process about the behavior that, in and of itself, reinforces the behavior in the future. As an example, I remember my first formal storytelling event quite vividly. The stories did not make sense to me, an experience many individuals have when hearing *myaamia* stories for the first time. However, I observed the times that other people were

laughing at the stories. While the things they were laughing at were in no way funny to me, this observation prompted me to think about the information on a deeper level every time I heard those stories (after fake laughing to not seem out of place). This observation, in conjunction with the cognitive control and cognitive capacity to create representations of the stories I was hearing, enabled me to deduce a particular meaning from the story and to truly begin to understand *myaamia* humor. For me, this humor is now a coping mechanism that promotes my own mental health on a daily basis.

In addition to this direct observation, *myaamia* people can learn vicariously through the characters in the story in an attempt to identify a message about living well. Through making a mental representation of the self in place of the characters in the story, the individual can imagine what would happen if that story were actually about them. For example, many *Wiihsakacaakwa* stories demonstrate the theme of persistence, a trait many could identify as a behavior promoting living well. Through identifying the self in *Wiihsakacaakwa*'s shoes, the individual can vicariously experience and gain an understanding of the importance of persistence in living well without having to endure the negative consequences that *Wiihsakacaakwa* did. In this process, they are able to learn information about how to live well without directly experiencing the event. The individual can then choose to engage in particular behaviors that either maximize living well or minimize threats to living well. Both observational and vicarious learning aid in learning behaviors in a non-threatening way.

Modeling. Bandura (1971) takes this observational learning one step further by suggesting that humans can learn through a process called modeling. The process of modeling capitalizes on learning by example. Modeling is the demonstration of how to

engage in a particular behavior, often by a trusted or respected other. Modeling occurs when an individual (the learner) observes the behavior of another person (the model) and emulates that behavior. While this is often an intentional process in which the model is making an effort to demonstrate a particular behavior, it can also be unintentional if a person is being watched without their awareness. Much learning occurs in this fashion because it is not practical and, in some cases, possible to learn through a typical trial and error processes. For example, the process of acquiring a language helps to shed light on this impracticality. It is not likely that an individual learning English without observation or modeling would be able to grasp the intricate differences in word pronunciation (i.e., been versus seen), let alone grammatical speech, by reinforcement of random vocalizations of sounds. Therefore, providing appropriate models in this case considerably shortens the process of acquisition. It is particularly helpful to have models for learning behaviors that might avoid dangerous or costly repercussions (i.e. texting while driving; Bandura, 1971).

Bandura (1969) reports that modeling is most efficient when utilizing the process of identification. Identification is the process of an individual patterning their thoughts, feelings, or actions after another person who serves as a model. This means that associational preferences are important because the people one is regularly around influences their level of identification and subsequently will determine the behaviors they are engaging in (Bandura, 1971). There are many ways in which individuals identify with others including perceived similarity with the model, a perceived superiority of the model, and through identifying particular roles to the model (i.e., gender roles). Regardless of the model of identification, this process is helpful to explain why some individuals imitate particular people.

For *myaamia* people at storytelling events, modeling can occur through the behaviors of the storytellers and other individuals who are easy to identify with (i.e., tribal leaders and elders). When individuals attend storytelling events, they may attend to, observe, and attempt to emulate the behaviors of others that are identified as promoting living well. The most critical example of this that I have personally noticed at many tribal functions is how individuals ask for advice from a respected other. In asking for advice, one does not simply approach someone with a question. Rather, they will offer up a token of appreciation, in the form of a gift, for the wisdom and base of experiences the person has. The advice will be asked in such a way to elicit past experiences or stories about the requested topic. Because this was a concept I was not necessarily accustomed to when I first began attending tribal events, I relied upon the modeling of others around me to learn the proper ways to ask for advice from elders. Interestingly, looking back on this experience, I identified with my model based on gender roles, as the person who modeled this behavior for me was a trusted woman I felt close to at the time. This was a powerful experience that shaped my further behavior and subsequent respect for the kinship system in place for our people. This, I would argue, is a critical component of living well for *myaamia* people. While this isn't necessarily an aspect of the explicit storytelling process, I would argue that storytelling events are opportune times for individuals to learn the proper behaviors for living well.

Reinforcement Systems. Beyond cognitive processes, observation, and modeling, an individual also might experience reinforcement systems that tend to shape behaviors over time. Bandura (1971) identified that humans have the capability of creating self-regulative influences to guide their future behavior. In particular, through the management of the causal factors for particular stimuli and through creating consequences for their own actions, people

are able to control their own behavior. When an individual engages in a particular behavior through the aforementioned processes, they will attempt to increase the behaviors that enable them to receive some sort of reward. As humans want to maximize the amount of pleasure in their lives, this tendency helps individuals to continue to repeat those behaviors they have experienced as pleasurable. Reinforcement acts as a source of information for an individual in which they gain information about what behaviors gain beneficial outcomes.

Conversely, humans will frequently discontinue behaviors that result in some sort of punishment. Because of an individual's advanced cognitive skills, many people are able to profit from experiences that result in punishment if they know that this behavior will benefit them in the long run. However, generally, people tend to avoid doing things that result in a negative experience. Through the capacity to represent outcomes symbolically, future consequences are often converted into motivators to influence their behavior. Additionally, reinforcements can be either external (imposed from someone else), vicarious (imposed by watching others), or can be from the self (reinforced because of one's experiences/internal reactions). Self-reinforcing functions tend to be most beneficial for producing lasting learning. This can be achieved through reinforcement over time that becomes internalized (often by parents/caregivers – 'important others; Bandura, 1971). Interestingly, within the *myaamia* community, if there are particular behaviors that are seen as positive within the community, those will be rewarded. While this process of rewarding another tribal member is typically not explicit (see purpose of storytelling section), the process of storytelling can be used to promote that behavior. Through the creative weaving of particular stories together, storytellers can give a subtle praise to individuals engaging in living well. Conversely, the weaving of stories can be used as a method to shame or to decrease particular behaviors that

go against living well. Ultimately, this process utilizing cognitive capabilities, observation, modeling, and reinforcement systems is utilized by *myaamiaki* in abstract ways to promote behaviors of living well. SLT is a useful theory to explain the relationship between storytelling and living well for *myaamia* people and can be used as a lens for data interpretation.

Resilience Theory. Resilience is defined by Masten (2001) as “good outcomes in spite of serious threats to adaptation or development” (p. 228). Masten suggests that this concept arose in the 1970’s by psychologists noticing children not developing pathology despite genetic predisposition for particular issues and living within high-risk situations. At this time, a postmodern philosophical movement was sweeping across many fields that were trying to shift from a reductionist, problem-oriented approach to one that nurtures the many strengths of individuals. It is believed that “resilience and resiliency theory may help to promote healing at a deeper, softer, yet more efficacious level” (Richardson, 2002, p. 308). As such, the levels of resilience that individuals display across time and various levels of risk have become important topics of interest (Klarreich, 1998; Vanderbilt-Adriance & Shaw, 2008). A landmark study by Richardson (2002) describes three distinct waves of research in this field.

Waves of resilience research. The first wave of resilience theory research did not emerge from academia, but rather from a phenomenological observation of seemingly normal or healthy individuals in high-risk environments. This prompted researchers to question what factors help individuals to cope or bounce back in the face of setbacks or challenges (Richardson, 2002). Therefore, this wave focused on identification of these particular factors involved in resilience. The first and foundational study in this was published as a book by

Werner and Smith (1992) and reported the longitudinal findings of a community-level study. This study began in 1955 and took place over the course of 30 years. They studied multiracial children and approximately 29% of the children were at risk due to environmental factors (i.e., perinatal stress, poverty, daily instability, and serious mental health problems). They found that 36% of the 200 were doing well despite the risk in their environments. The researchers identified that being female, robust, socially responsible, adaptable, tolerant, achievement-oriented, good communicator, and having good self-esteem were the factors that seemed to foster resilience in these children. In addition, they noted that having a caregiving environment both inside and outside the family is a helpful factor. As such, this landmark study prompted additional examinations into protective factors promoting resilience.

Subsequently, researchers have consistently found that having a high self-esteem, being in interpersonal relationships with peers and adults, having a supportive family, and being female are amongst those protective factors (Benson, 1997; Garmezy, Masten, & Tellegen, 1984; Rutter, 1985; Werner & Smith, 1992). Garmezy and colleagues (1984) launched the Minnesota Risk Project to examine resiliency in children of schizophrenics between 1971 and 1982. They identified that those who possessed effectiveness, high expectancies, a positive outlook, self-esteem, internal locus of control, self-discipline, good problem-solving skills, critical thinking skills and humor were less likely to develop schizophrenia themselves. In particular, they coined “Garmezy’s triad of resiliency” to reflect those who had a particular personality disposition, a supportive family environment, and an external support system. These individuals tended to demonstrate high levels of resilience (Richardson, 2002, p. 309). Additionally, Benson (1997) examined 350,000 youth

who they determined function optimally from 600 different communities between 1990 and 1995. Benson corroborated many of the findings from earlier studies on resilience but also grouped these protective factors into two groups: external and internal. External factors are those that can be taught or provided for an individual and are not an internal source of protection (i.e., receiving support, knowing boundaries and expectations, and finding a constructive use of time). Internal factors included those that are internal factors that an individual must develop on their own (i.e., educational commitment, positive values, social competencies, and a positive identity). Together all of the studies in the first wave of resilience research isolated particular traits or behaviors that can be promoted within youth in order to promote wellness.

The second wave of resilience research intended to uncover the process of developing resilience in order to structure interventions intended to foster this important trait in youth. Resilience became defined at this time as “the process of coping with adversity, change, or opportunity in a manner that results in the identification, fortification, and enrichment of resilient qualities or protective factors” (Richardson, 2002, p. 308). Richardson and colleagues (1990) developed a model of resilience to streamline process research. This model identifies resilience as the process of a person passing through *biopsychospiritual homeostasis*, or a point in time when one has adapted physically, mentally, and spiritually to a set of circumstances, whether good or bad. At this point, the individual experiences disruption within some arena of their life. The individual then goes through a period in which he or she internalizes the experience and eventually becomes ready for the reintegration of the experience into their personal narrative. During the process of reintegrating the experience into their personal narrative, the individual may choose to do so

resiliently, returning either back to homeostasis or with some type of loss. This is an introspective experience that requires identifying, accessing, and nurturing resilient qualities they typically already possess. Throughout this process, people either consciously or unconsciously choose the outcomes of these disruptions in their life. Resilient reintegration results in growth, knowledge, self-understanding, and increased strength of resilient qualities. Werner and Smith (1992) identified this to be a “self-righting mechanism” that helps individuals to overcome challenges in their life (p. 202). This process occurs multiple times in one’s life as they are faced with more and more disruptions. However, chronic stressors occur when the individual is not able to develop resiliency or have not grown through previous disruptions in their life. Luthar & Zelazo (2003) suggest that people who display resilience generally become stronger through skill-building, creative coping, and overcoming challenges. However, Masten (2001) claims that resilience is something that is an ordinary experience and that all people are capable of displaying resilience. The reasons individuals may or may not display resilience are often culture-specific and a result of the individual’s interaction with their environment.

The third wave of resilience research resulted in the actual theory of resilience itself. Richardson (2002) claims that this theory is controversial as it suggests that resilience is the motivational force within everyone that drives them to pursue wisdom, self-actualization, and altruism and to be in harmony with a spiritual source of strength (or innate resilience). The incorporation of a spiritual force has invited skepticism from many scholars. This theory is not field-specific as many fields utilize resilience theory (psychoneuroimmunology, philosophy, physics, psychology, Eastern medicine, and neuroscience) to explain human phenomena, but there are two claims that are common across fields. The first claim is that

the means for activating resilience comes from one's ecosystem. This claim suggests that there are external factors that influence one's potential for resilience. Within the current study, this means that the external factor of storytelling in the *myaamia* community might be a means for activating resilience in community members. The second claim is that resilience is a capacity in every soul. Interestingly, while many theories tend to first develop a theory and later test it cross culturally, resilience theory emerged from a multicultural framework. As such, literature on resiliency of racial and ethnic minority groups is more common.

Resilience research with American Indians. Many scholars studying American Indian populations have adopted strengths-based approaches to research and have also embraced resilience theory. This is likely because it is very congruent with American Indian ways of knowing and this group has experienced many historical traumas. First, Heavyrunner and Sebastian Morris (1996) suggest that there are ten values, beliefs and behaviors that are essential or innate in American Indian cultural resilience: spirituality, child-rearing/extended family, veneration of age/wisdom/tradition, respect for nature, generosity and sharing, cooperation/group harmony, autonomy/respect for others, composure/patience, relativity of time, and non-verbal communication. While the authors of this paper generalize across all American Indian people, these factors seem to be specific to particular tribes based on cultural practices. Furthermore, Strand & Peacock (2002) corroborate previous resilience findings suggesting that self-esteem is critical for fostering resilience in American Indian children. They also affirm Heavyrunner and Sebastian Morris' findings that immersion in culture, family participation in culture, and understanding of how to live on the "right path" (called living well for *myaamiaki*) all contribute to resilience. Subsequently, Lafromboise and colleagues (2006) surveyed children who were faced with

family adversity and researchers identified as “resilient” based on prosocial outcomes. Results showed there are key risk and protective factors. Risk factors include perceived discrimination; protective factors include family warmth and maternal support, community support, and enculturation. As such, resilience theory is a common guiding framework within community-based research and suggests that cultural factors play a role in resilience. From resilience theory emerged a general approach to research and interventions within at-risk groups. Strengths-based approaches are becoming more widely used and will serve as a framework for understanding the research methodology of the current study.

Strengths-based approaches. Stories might be particularly important way to understand living well as it is consistent with a strengths-based approach to research methodology and exemplifies the resilience demonstrated by individuals, families, groups, and/or organizations to foster recovery and empowerment. Rather than examining and overcoming the deficits or problems of an individual or community, strengths-based approaches examine the resources and abilities that will enable growth (Scerra, 2011). These approaches seem to be utilized most frequently in the social work literature and practice (Guo & Tsui, 2010; Sue, Rasheed & Rasheed, 2015), but has gained recognition in some of the psychology literature over time (Padesky & Mooney, 2012). However, the basic principles of strengths-based approaches outlined by Saint-Jacques and colleagues (2009) demonstrate alignment with humanistic theory and, in particular, Rogers’ (1979) person-centered therapy. In addition, this approach aligns well with the *myaamia* worldview and emphasis on strengths of individuals and the community in promoting living well. As such, this will be a driving framework for the current study.

Strengths-based approaches are based on six key principles (Saint-Jacques et al., 2009 as cited in Scerra, 2011). First, all individuals, families, groups, and communities have strengths and the emphasis is based on these strengths rather than deficits or pathology. The important part of a strengths-based approach is to work with the appropriate entity to discover and promote the particular strengths they possess. Second, communities provide many resources that promote growth. Many researchers devalue local and community-specific forms of knowledge and resources, which does a disservice to many individuals and groups. Third, interventions are built on self-determination. It is important that the group or individual is an active participant in discovering and promoting their own growth. Fourth, collaboration between the practitioner and client is necessary. In the case of working in a therapeutic setting, the individual should be empowered to make his or her own change. However, that same principle can be applied to intervention on the group and community levels. Fifth, outreach is considered the favored form of intervention. Sixth, all individuals have the intrinsic ability to learn, grow, and change. In strengths-based methodologies, the focus is on the individual and not the content. These approaches do not ignore problems, but rather deem it important to shift the frame of reference to what works well to support growth of individuals. This is a process of rediscovery that is believed to assist in healing and creating lasting change in individuals (Pulla, 2012). Furthermore, this is the point that overlaps well with humanistic theory as this theory promotes self-actualization and personal growth. In essence, this approach to research and intervention is active and intended to be empowering for the entity receiving the help. Importantly, strengths-based approaches are grounded in resilience theory and the vast interdisciplinary research aiding in health promotion.

Current Study

As storytelling is likely a source of resilience for *myaamiaki*, it is important to explore the specific ways in which individuals use stories and storytelling to learn how to live well. The present study aims to explore this relationship by utilizing an ethnographic approach to consider how *myaamiaki* understand living well, how the storytelling content and process for *myaamiaki* is related to individual interpretations of living well, and how storytelling and living well may evolve throughout one's life. As with most ethnographic approaches, this study will take a postmodernist view with an interpretive lens, allowing the data to unfold within the today's understanding of the world and by valuing the multiple perspectives that may exist surrounding the group in question (Creswell, 2013; Bloland, 1995). Consistent with this, individual, semi-structured interviews with tribal members will be utilized to gather in-depth qualitative data concerning these questions. Specifically, I am examining the following research questions:

1. How do *myaamiaki* understand living well?
2. How do *myaamiaki* understand (themes/values) *Wiihsakacaakwa* stories?
3. What is the relationship between *Wiihsakacaakwa* stories and individual understandings of living well?
 - a. In what ways does the content from *Wiihsakacaakwa* stories help individuals to live well?
 - b. In what ways does the process of storytelling help individuals to live well?
4. How does an individual's understanding of *Wiihsakacaakwa* stories evolve throughout his or her life?

In addition to these interviews, I will be a participant observer of the *myaamia* storytelling event at the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma's 2018 Winter Gathering. I will take extensive field notes as well as write a more extensive reflection the night after the storytelling event takes place. These notes will be compared with the data obtained in the interviews in order to corroborate the findings regarding individuals' understandings of the relationship between storytelling and living well.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Research Design/Approach

This study utilized an ethnographic approach in examining the impact of storytelling on living well for *myaamia* people. LeCompte and Schensul (2010) outlined many of the rationales behind why an individual might conduct an ethnographic approach and, for this study, it is because I am attempting to explore the understandings of a culture-sharing group. More specifically, I want to understand how *myaamiaki* make sense of and use storytelling to aid them on their path toward living well. The primary data collection took place over the course of two days in Miami, Oklahoma at the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma's annual Winter Gathering (January 26th and 27th, 2018). First, I was a participant observer over the course of the two days of the gathering, taking field notes and engaging with community members. This resulted in observations of several tribal events (games, storytelling, educational presentations, etc.), the storytelling event, informal gatherings, as well as casual conversations. Second, I conducted 15 one-hour interviews with individual adult tribal members on the role of stories in their path to living well and in their daily lives. Ultimately, I obtained interviews with 8 women and 7 men in an attempt to have even numbers of men and women and gain a representative sample of the community. Thirteen of these interviews took place after the storytelling event, but prior to the individuals leaving Oklahoma to return to their daily lives. The final two took place via Skype in the following week after the gathering event. In order to record the data, I took notes during the observations and audio recorded the interviews with participant informed consent. A professional transcriber transcribed the recordings within two weeks of completing the interviews. The notes and

transcriptions were then sent to the participants in order to examine them for accuracy and to explain content further if they chose. Next, I read through and took notes on the data twice in order to identify potential initial codes. This step was important to allow me to become familiar with the data. At this point, I developed a code list that described the social setting, actors, and events, ultimately leading to larger themes in the data. Because the understanding of the themes grew over time, I coded the data independently three times.

Analysis of the field notes taken during the Winter Gathering was based on Musante & DeWalt's (2010) guide for participant observation. I first focused on the data reduction process in which I selected, focused, simplified, abstracted, and transformed my field notes based on the study's questions. Upon completion of data reduction, similar to the process described in regards to the interviews, I developed codes, or abstract ideas, that emerged from the data. Furthermore, these codes were then triangulated against the interview data and interpreted for patterns that emerge through multiple sources of data. Throughout the data analysis process, the themes were continually refined in order to develop a complex network that most closely resembles what was actually occurring at the *myaamia* storytelling event (Becker & Geer, 1960). Then, I examined the data for recurrent themes and patterns of regularities, beginning to draw a picture of what could be going on at the storytelling events. Throughout this process, I interpreted the data from my own perspective, offering an explanation of *how* and *why* the culture engages in particular behaviors (Wolcott, 1994). Furthermore, both Dr. Warren Phillips and Dr. David Vogel both served as external auditors, also coding and interpreting one participant interview separately and comparing their results with mine (also separately) prior to the final interpretation of the results.

Participants

Participants in the proposed study were 15 enrolled members of either the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma or the Miami Nation of Indiana who attended the tribe's annual Winter Gathering in Miami, Oklahoma. There were 15 tribal members involved in order to gain the most representative sample of the community possible without identifying participants in the results. For the purposes of this study, the participants were adults of at least 18 years of age and have had exposure to storytelling in their past (see Sampling and Selection section for more information). The participants consisted of 8 males and 7 females. Aside from gender identity, demographic information was not collected from participants. Because additional information gathered would likely identify participants within the community, this was an ethical decision made to protect participants. However, based on knowledge of the participants, they ranged in age from 18 to 60+, and hold various positions within the tribe (employee of tribe, employee of Myaamia Center at Miami University, student, and tribal member without formal "position). Most individuals who participated in this study are from lower- to middle-class backgrounds and live in various locations throughout the United States.

Researcher Background

As a tribal member, I have a very intimate and important relationship with the population of interest. Throughout my life, I attended pow wows and the occasional annual meeting (governmental meeting) as a young child with my father and grandmother. However, my exposure to and connection with people outside my immediate family began when I first attended *Eewansaapita* 'sunrise' summer camp at age 10. I attended the camp in Oklahoma for one week with two of my closest cousins. At that point, I was intrigued by and

excited about learning more about the language and culture of my people. I attended these camps every year until I was too old to continue (age 16), at which point, I was asked to come back as a counselor for the kids attending. I was a counselor through late high school and college. During my time in *Eewansaapita*, I came to be excited about the opportunities that are afforded to tribal students who attend Miami University. I knew that both personally and financially, this was something I could not pass up.

I began my first year of college at Miami University in the Fall of 2009. At this point, I began attending what we called “tribe class” that was required of all students who received the Heritage Award. This class was a series of three topics: ecological perspectives, language, and sovereignty/current issues. This class was where I began to form relationships with tribal members who I had never met before, but was related to. I formed one of the most important relationships in my life during these classes and continue to engage with many of the students I met at that time. During my senior year, it became clear that I would move on to graduate school and elected to write a paper on how learning one’s heritage language improves mental health. This jumpstarted my search for graduate schools and I knew that I should go somewhere that would be able to support the type of research I wanted to do. I continue, to this day, to engage with my tribe on a personal level participating in tribal events, as well as on an academic level, conducting research as part of a team.

Ethical Considerations

In order to avoid any ethical missteps, I have consulted Creswell’s (2013) reference to ethical issues during qualitative research. The first step in this process was to gain approval from the university’s institutional review board (IRB #17-528). I received final approval on January 16th, 2018 after submitting edits suggested by the tribal business committee (see

Appendix E). While the IRB is a great first step, it is also important to gain approval from the site at which an individual is working so as to gain credibility and not overstep any boundaries the community has with regards to research. Therefore, I also obtained approval by the tribe's business committee on January 12th. The approval and support of the Tribal leadership was important as it means that the research is supported by (though not coming from) the tribe itself. This means that the respectful avenues have been taken in order to prevent the participants from being taken advantage of.

In order to further ensure the study is ethically sound, it is important to outline the purpose of the study for participants. They should be well-informed as to why the research is being conducted without compromising the purpose of the study. As such, I presented a non-leading rationale to all participants in the form of a consent form at the time of the study. Participants had a chance to read and ask questions to help ensure that the participants were knowledgeable about what would be taking place and make them feel more at ease during the process. All participants agreed to participate and signed the informed consent. Furthermore, with this particular community, a sense of reciprocity is important to establish. Culturally, anytime someone asks others for help, it is custom to present that individual with a gift in exchange for their help. As such, for this study, I presented participants with a gift basket with fruit and a small bundle of tobacco. This is a small token of appreciation and shows the individual that I respect what they have to say. In addition, I used some *myaamia* language in the interview (basic greeting terms and in expressing thanks) to establish rapport and show respect for the person.

In order to maintain ethical soundness during the data collection process itself, it was important for my research to not disrupt the process of the tribal events. I worked to build

the trust of individuals that I was interacting with. One way that I attempted to build this trust was by developing relationships with community members at tribal events. I made it a priority to be in attendance at all annual meetings and Winter Gatherings beginning in 2015 in order to build rapport with tribal members for my dissertation. Additionally, while interviewing, the interview questions were as non-leading as possible in order to avoid eliciting expected results or pressure participants into saying a particular response. Lastly, in analyzing data maintaining ethical guidelines means I presented multiple perspectives, reported contrary findings to the hypotheses, and de-identified data so the individuals cannot be identified by readers.

Ethnography from the Inside. As I reflect on the methodology of the current study, I consistently refer back to the insider versus outsider debate that occurs surrounding ethnographers, primarily in the field of anthropology. I grappled with the questions of whether I will be spending sufficient time in the field *and* whether it is appropriate to be a community member conducting research with my own community. While distinct and substantially different questions, they overlap with regards to their answers. In Biolsi and Zimmerman's (1997) *Indians and Anthropologists*, a lively discussion about the relationship between anthropologists and American Indian communities was pursued, particularly regarding the ethical considerations surrounding this affiliation. The pain and frustration that comes from the pages is difficult to read, sharing stories of communities feeling as though they are in a "zoo" and the rights of participants are not protected simply because the ethical standards that the researchers are held to are not the same ethics of the communities being studied. They call for taking extra steps to ensure anonymity of participants, all the while knowing it can never be fully ensured. They note that life stories and kinship relations are

not to be shared in this manner. In particular, it calls for a need for self-awareness in order to align with the group being studied rather than feeling superior to it.

The outsider has always been touted as the most objective and valuable researcher in ethnographies. However, Zimmerman (1997) suggests that insiders as researchers alleviate many of these ethical issues that might arise. Insiders know and are able to respect the values and ethics of the community being studied, share only what is appropriate to be shared, and ultimately share the community's perspective of the questions. Insiders bring an awareness of the community that can only be gained through personal experience. There are positive and negative factors of both the insider and outsider voice in ethnographies, but having the insider as the storyteller offers the exact perspective that is being sought. As noted by Cook-Lynn (1996), the story of American Indians has been told by non-American Indian people for so long, that the stories strip this group of their identity. She asks, "is anyone doing the intellectual work in and about Indian communities that will help us understand our future?" (p. 74). Additionally, Smith (2014) indicated that indigenous communities often need help and ask for help in understanding wellness within their communities. However, in making requests from institutions to help with this research, the institutions are often "ill-prepared" for this task because of their lack of knowledge and context (p. 20). As an insider, I am able to examine through the lens of someone who does have this context.

Furthermore, being a participant observer and embedded within the *myaamia* community in the way that I am means that this is the lens or the filter through which I am interpreting the data (Saldaña, 2015). According to Saldaña (2015), my status as a community member is influencing the questions being asked, the responses I receive from participants when asking interview questions, the makeup of my participant pool, the detail

of my field notes, and the perspective I take when analyzing the data. Because this research is driven by the community itself and, in the eyes of the community, requires an insider to be able to do this work ethically, it is important that I am utilizing the lens of an insider. This is crucial to obtain the results that are sought after by the community and to obtain the trust of the community in a way that makes this research accurate.

Through this research, I have come to the conclusion that, yes, I have spent enough time in the field to do this research. Yes, it is sufficient for an insider to conduct research on her own community. In fact, these might even be preferred because I am uniquely able to use the findings to write our story in a way that can be understood and used by our people. On the other hand, it is possible that being an insider means a researcher might make assumptions about the community based on their individual knowledge of the community rather than based on their results. In the current study, I will do my best to minimize this influence by triangulating the data (in two ways; see below) and attempting to observe the community through as objective of a lens as is possible.

Procedure

This study's data collection took place over the course of 2 days in Miami, Oklahoma corresponding with the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma's Winter Gathering. However, as a myaamia tribal citizen, my exposure to the community, storygelling, and Winter Gatherings has taken place over the course of 17 years.

Recruitment. The participants were recruited via two methods, ultimately ensuring that everyone attending the storytelling event that met the criteria have the opportunity to participate in the study. First, I placed an advertisement on Facebook with information regarding the study (purpose, scope, inclusion criteria, and location) as well as my personal

contact information so potential participants could contact me about the study. The correspondence regarding participation was intended to occur via email and not in a public domain such as Facebook so as to protect the confidentiality of the participants as much as possible as well as to disconnect myself from the Tribal government. However, as none of the participants contacted me ahead of time, I obtained all participants by announcing the study at the Winter Gathering events prior to the storytelling event. I brought a sign-up sheet for participants to schedule a time to meet with me to participate in the study.

Sampling and Selection. Prior to the storytelling event, I advertised for the study on the tribe's Facebook page in advance of the event (see Facebook post in Appendix B). However, no participants contacted me ahead of the event, leading me to announce the study at the Winter Gathering itself. After the announcement, the first 15 individuals who came to me with interest were selected as participants.

Setting. An important aspect of *myaamia* narratives and *myaamia* life is place. The stories containing specific references to place are rooted in social life, identity, politics, and interconnectedness with the land. As such, the site for the collection of data was very important and contributed to the experience of those participating in the study. Intentionally, the chosen site for this study is at the annual Winter Gathering held by the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma in Miami, Oklahoma. The tribal headquarters are in the city of Miami, a small town that is in Northeastern Oklahoma along Route 66. The residents are a homogenous group of mainly White individuals with many tribes in the area. Specifically, *myaamiaki* are the largest tribal group with Wyandotte, Eastern Shawnee, and Quapaw peoples, among others living in the area. The residents, including many of the Native people in the area, identify as Christian and many hold conservative values. Regarding the actual location of

data collection, interviews took place on tribally owned land. Primarily, it was important to maintain flexibility with the particular site where the interviews took place as the events surrounding the Winter Gathering can change.

As such, the actual data collection took place in two locations. First, the interviews that took place in the morning were conducted at the hotel where many of the attendees of the Winter Gathering were staying. This was the most convenient location as the community events did not begin until the noon hour. For these, we found a private space on the main floor where the interviews would not be interrupted and set up a comfortable spot for the interviews. Second, the rest of the interviews took place in the Community Center, a building next to the building where the community gathering takes place. This building is a space most often used for day care for children and other meetings that are held by tribal employees. For these interviews, I found a private room with a table where we could set up the interviews and had participants walk over from the main building.

Interviews. The main form of data collection was through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 15 tribal members (8 women, 7 men). The intent of having a semi-structured format was so that I could ask for further information and to clarify information. Anytime I asked a question that was not noted in the interview guide, I noted a reason for asking that question so as to keep records of when my own knowledge is influencing my protocol.

Interview protocol. During the interviews, I utilized a guiding interview protocol sheet containing any prompts that I wish the participants to all hear (greetings, thanks, introduction to study, and debriefing) as well as the questions for the study. This interview protocol sheet had adequate space for me to take notes on the responses and any nonverbal information that I deem necessary for data analysis. However, I did not write answers

verbatim in order to maintain the integrity of the rapport between the participants and myself. Instead, the interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed prior to data analysis (see interview protocol in Appendix C).

Observations. In addition to the interviews, I also observed the community as a participant in the Winter Gathering activities. This is an imperative portion of the study, as I gained information on the process of storytelling. Based on Musante and DeWalt's (2010) procedures for participant observation, I maintained an open stream of observation, specifically focused on the study's research questions. In particular, I observed three portions of the Winter Gathering weekend including (1) the "Storytelling 101" lecture to help prepare individuals for the storytelling event, (2) the open portion of the day in which attendees played games and socialized, and (3) the storytelling event itself. I looked for interactions between audience members before, during, and after the storytelling event, interactions between storytellers during the event, as well as interactions between storytellers and the audience during the event. I brought a small notebook to jot field notes as I observed important and relevant information. Each night, I recorded the observations and reflections from that particular day in my laptop.

Event Description. Attendees for the weekend included many groups of people. Primarily tribal members attended the event, with the majority coming from Miami, Oklahoma. However, many other tribal members traveled from out of town and were also in attendance. Because of the partnership between the tribe and Miami University, there were also many students, faculty, and staff from the University who are not affiliated with the tribe in attendance at the gathering. From the University traveling together to Oklahoma were 9 Myaamia Center staff, 10 *myaamia* students, 3 other non-*myaamia* students from Miami

University (journalism students writing about the gathering), 6 education, health, and society (EHS) student ambassadors, 4 staff from the EHS program (with 2 of their children), 2 faculty from the history department, 4 staff members from University communications and marketing, and one anthropologist from the Sunwatch Indian Village/Archaeological Park in Dayton, Ohio. Arriving separately were four other important faculty and staff from the University including the Vice President for Student Affairs, Senior Associate Vice President for University Advancement, Associate Provost and Dean for the Graduate School and Research, and a Faculty Emeritus in Educational Psychology and former Dean of Students.

During the course of the event, there were numerous presentations, meals, and games that attendees participated in. The majority of these took place in a building referred to by *myaamiaki* as the “Myaamia Center.” This building is a large, open room with around 100 chairs set up at any given time; 50 chairs on each side of the room with an aisle down the middle. Upon entering through the main doors of the building, one can see the three flags set up in the corner: the US flag, the Miami Nation flag, and the Oklahoma state flag. On the back wall is mounted an iron cast of the tribal seal, 9 birds in flight, and a depiction of a turtle (art by a *myaamia* tribal member). The rest of the room contains functional spaces including restrooms, storage rooms, and a food serving station.

For the first event I observed, which was titled “Storytelling 101,” there were 88 people in attendance total, with approximately 50 being *myaamia* tribal members. There was a tribal police officer in the back of the room observing the event, two women selling t-shirts in the back-right (behind the chairs) corner of the room, and tribal leaders sitting in the front, but off to the side. Many people were sitting in their affiliated groups mentioned previously. This presentation was given by George Ironstrack, the Assistant Director of the Myaamia

Center and the Director of the Education and Outreach Office at the Myaamia Center. He was utilizing a PowerPoint presentation to share about the “what, who, why, and where” regarding storytelling. This included a history of storytelling for *myaamiaki*, a description of who storytellers are today and were in the past, the reasons for storytelling (described in literature review), and where this typically occurs (both formally at tribal events and informally in the home). This was set up as information to help individuals new to storytelling to better understand and respect the act of storytelling, and to help them with a bit more context on what to expect given their difference from US stories. He utilized primarily English to describe storytelling, but would occasionally utilize *myaamia* words like *wihsakacaakwa* (a character name) or *papankamwa* ‘fox’ to refer to characters or aspects of storytelling. He would translate these words into English when appropriate. After the presentation was over, he opened the floor for questions and two people asked questions. The two questions were “Do you have a sense that there were public storytelling events in the same way as social dance events?” and “Are there also spring, summer, and fall stories?” George answered these questions and indicated that any additional questions could be directed to either him or the other storytellers.

Throughout the day after the “Storytelling 101” presentation, there were also a number of games and socializing taking place. This portion of the day was much more informal and allowed individuals to engage in whatever they were interested in or simply observe. The games that were in play were *seenseewinki* ‘the bowl game,’ the *mahkisina* ‘moccasin’ game, and the stick game. In particular, there was a *mahkisina* game tournament in which two games were going on at once and the winners of each game went on to play one another for the 2018 Winter Gathering *mahkisina* game champions. The name of the group

that wins is etched into a wooden box to commemorate the tournament and collegiality at the gathering. There were primarily *myaamiaki* engaging in the games themselves with non-*myaamia* attendees observing, but there were some individuals who did utilize the invitation to play games and played alongside *myaamiaki*.

The final event that I observed was the storytelling portion of the day. Storytelling took place following the dinner after the game portion of the day. The storytelling event had 93 people in attendance with approximately 60 being *myaamia* individuals. For this event, the chairs were set up in a semi-circle around the front of the room, creating a space for the storytellers to share stories. There were blankets placed on the floor in the front for children to sit. There were 6 children laying on their stomachs (at least to start) on these blankets. The 6 storytellers (4 male, 2 female) were sitting on the right side of the makeshift stage area waiting for their turn to share a story. The audience was engaging in conversation leading up to the start of the event, when they became quiet throughout the storytelling. The storytellers took turns sharing their stories for about 45 minutes total, when the event closed for the night. All attendees helped out with putting chairs and the tables from dinner in the storage spaces of the building.

Procedures to address trustworthiness and credibility

In order to establish trustworthiness and credibility in the design of the current study, two procedures were implemented using Lincoln and Guba's (1985) definitions. First, the data in the current study were triangulated in two ways. Triangulation occurred through utilizing multiple methods of data collection including both observation and in-depth interviews. This ensured that the data is transferrable between different methods of data collection. Second, the data were triangulated using multiple raters during the data analysis

stage of the study. Dr. Warren Phillips and Dr. David Vogel both served as external auditors, determining whether or not the interpretations and conclusions of the study are in alignment with the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988). In particular, they each separately read and analyze one unique interview as external auditors. Their analysis was then discussed with me and compared against my own codes. There was no additional information regarding the coding that was provided by Dr. Phillips and Dr. Vogel, but they each provided insights that aided in the interpretation of the codes for the discussion section.

In addition to the methods for triangulating data, there were other procedures in place to establish trustworthiness and credibility. Notably, I clarified the researcher bias from the beginning of the study (see Researcher Background section above) in an attempt to lay my own biases on the table for the reader. This was an important step so that the reader knows what assumptions and experiences likely shape the approach and findings of the study and to attempt to bracket my own biases throughout the process (Merriam, 1988). In addition, due to the interpretive paradigm the study is operating under, LeCompte and Schensul (2010) suggest that member checks are imperative. In order to situate the findings of the current study within the culture being studied, the participants themselves had an ability to give feedback on their interviews. As such, the transcripts were sent to the participants and they were given an opportunity to alter the transcripts to ensure the intended meaning was captured. Only two participants elected to modify their interviews, primarily for spelling and grammar mistakes. The coding occurred after the modified transcripts were received. After the data were coded, the participants received the themes and general interpretations of their interviews for an additional chance to provide feedback regarding the accuracy of the codes in representing their experience. In this stage, none of the participants provided any

additional feedback regarding the themes (one participant did ask that a portion of their interview not be directly quoted to avoid familial discord).

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The purpose of the study was to explore the relationship between storytelling and living well for *myaamiaki*. This chapter will detail the process that was utilized when I analyzed my data gathered from semi-structured interviews. The findings intend to shed light on the following questions:

1. How do *myaamiaki* understand living well?
2. How do *myaamiaki* understand (themes/values) *Wiihsakacaakwa* stories?
3. What is the relationship between *Wiihsakacaakwa* stories and individual understanding of living well?
 - a. In what ways does the content from *Wiihsakacaakwa* stories that help individuals to live well?
 - b. In what ways does the process of storytelling help individuals to live well?
4. How does an individual's development influence their understanding of *Wiihsakacaakwa* stories?

Primary Findings

One of the key concepts that presented throughout the process of data analysis, was participants talking about *interconnectedness*. This concept is prevalent within *myaamia* and other indigenous communities' ways of knowing and describes the connection between all beings in the universe. Importantly, it also emphasizes that there is a purpose and respect for all these connected beings. The concept of interconnectedness was present across all aspects of the data that I collected. However, while the theme emerged repeatedly across the different questions, there were important distinctions based on which question was being

answered. A visual representation of the results (and their hierarchy) can be found in Appendix E. Next, I will explain the findings of the current study as closely to the participants' experiences as I can.

Question 1: How Do Myaamiaki Understand *nahi-mehtoseeniwinki* 'living well'?

It is important to revisit here that *nahi-mehtoseeniwinki* 'living well' is not currently a well-defined construct within the *myaamia* community. This concept has not been discussed explicitly within public events, but similar to storytelling, is discussed more abstractly and the message of how to live well might be interpreted differently by each individual. As such, this is a very important question to be asking because it will shed light on the ways in which *myaamiaki* conceptualize *nahi-mehtoseeniwinki*. The following themes are in order from most to least frequently mentioned by participants, with no judgment on how important they are to *myaamia* understanding of living well.

Table 2

Results of Question 1

How do <i>myaamiaki</i> understand <i>nahi-mehtoseeniwinki</i> ?			
Community Health	Balance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental health • Physical health 	<i>Weekiwiteehioni</i> 'mindfulness'	<i>Weeyaakiteehheciki</i> 'they are happy'

Community health. The first and most frequently discussed topic in relation to what it means to live well was community health. This concept was mentioned by eleven of the fifteen participants. Participants reported that the individual's health doesn't come without being part of a healthy community (in this case the *myaamia* community). Interestingly, this concept was seen as a necessary but insufficient quality of *nahi-mehtoseeniwinki*, in that being part of the *myaamia* community doesn't indicate that you are healthy, but it is important for achieving *nahi-mehtoseeniwinki*. This is exemplified by one participant's description of living well within their perspective:

“It's not the only way to understand it but you can't get the rich, multi-dimensional picture, or view of what it means without community. It is the good and the bad in the community, right? I mean not everyone loves each other or gets along, but even through that you know you get a strong sense of the ties. And it doesn't matter what happens between people over time. You are still bound as a community and that's important.”

Within this view, *nahi-mehtoseeniwinki* is described as a multi-dimensional concept and community health is one important dimension. Of note, this individual did not indicate that the community relationships are, or need to be, positive at all times, but rather the bond as a community is what denotes living well.

Additionally, community health was described as strong relationships that one holds within the community. Not only is it important that the community as a whole is bonded, but individual relationships are central to this concept of community health. One participant in particular noted, “It [living well] comes from being able to interact and understand our community as family...I think through the strength of those relationships comes internal strength as well.” This is an important nuanced understanding of community health as the individual believes that the way we “understand our community as family” is through language. Therefore, language is the means through which individuals are able to build

individual relationships, contributing to community health which, in turn, contributes to *nahi-mehtoseeniwinki*. While not all participants noted that language was the particular tie, many individuals discussed the connection between relationships, community building, and ultimately living well.

Balance. In addition to the sense of community health, participants identified that a sense of balance is critical to *nahi-mehtoseeniwinki*. Clients referred to this sense of balance as knowing what their needs are in each of these domains (mental and physical health) and taking care of needs in those particular areas. However, while some individuals had a difficult time describing what living well is, they had an easier time describing a lack of balance as a means for recognizing when they are not living well. For example, one individual described that living well is:

“the understanding that it will always come off balance but you always -- it will always go this way or that way but when that happens you need to bring it back in some way. I think that's something I'm still figuring out. How do I do this, try to bring it back into balance?”

In this case, the person knows that they are not living well when things come “off balance” and this helps them to identify behaviors to get on the path to living well. Also present in this description, living well is emphasized as less of an outcome that an individual is striving to achieve, but rather a process of living in such a way that we have the skills to bring ourselves back into balance when things go astray.

Furthermore, this sense of balance is individualized to each individual based on the important things in one’s life. For example, one individual who was a student and identifies as Christian indicated:

“I would probably break it down into almost like three pillars, physical, mental and spiritual. Obviously physically -- taking care of yourself, eating well, working out. Mental -- obviously, you have to push yourself mentally, get your schoolwork done,

make sure you're getting mental stimulation and spiritual as well. For me I have to read the Bible often or at least get into prayer. Yeah, just being balanced with all that.”

For this individual, the mental and physical health is important (as it is for many participants, see below), but the spiritual component is unique. Aligning with Neal and Neal’s (2013) model for ecological systems, an individual’s sense of balance is dependent on the various systems in which she/he interacts. Many *myaamia* individuals practice religions, but this person was the only one who mentioned this as an overt component of *nahi-mehtoseeniwinki*. For other individuals, this might be a job or other communities they are a part of because *nahi-mehtoseeniwinki* is unique to each individual.

Lastly, balance in the components of what it means to live well was also seen as a precursor to achieving higher order goals for some individuals. For example, one participant described a balance between mental and physical health as necessary in order to achieve other goals.

“I think for me I tend to land on a more intellectual side of that so that it's about striving to increase your awareness of the world, to increase your knowledge so that you can use that knowledge in a way that reflects the cultural norms here in my community around wisdom, about making good choices. All that is bound up in the context of community responsibilities, obligations as well as community support, love. And so, to do all those things you have to be both mentally and physically healthy.”

This participant identified balance as crucial within any conversation about living well because in order to live out one’s values, one must achieve this sense of balance. Part of being able to make positive decisions in one’s life means making positive choices to take care of one’s body and mind.

Mental health. An additional component of *nahi-mehtoseeniwinki* for many of the individuals interviews was striving for positive mental health. Some individuals discussed

this concept in terms of stress reduction, while others disclosed symptoms of anxiety and/or depression they have experienced throughout the course of their life. Mental health was also directly mentioned (i.e., using words “mental health”) as part of living well for 8 different participants and indirectly (i.e., discussing coping mechanisms, difficult life situations, etc.) by an additional 4 participants. One participant indicated that “it's [living well] just that positive feeling of knowing your mind is right, not in the dysfunctional type of way but just in the moving forward way.” This participant talked about needing to be able to move on with one’s life despite the problematic thinking that arises from life’s troubles and obstacles. This component is related to a sense of resilience, or ability to maintain positive behaviors and wellness despite experiencing negative influences on one’s life (Masten, 2001).

In addition, some participants discussed that mental health is a necessary precursor to other components of living well. For example, one participant said, “I feel like living well, for myself, begins in a mental place before it gets down to the physical body. I feel like I have to check my mental state before I can even begin taking care of my body.” While many individuals talked about mental and physical health as needing to be in balance, what that balance might look like could vary for each person. For this participant, a balance means having their mental health in check before being able to work on aspects of physical health like food decisions or exercise.

Physical health. In addition to mental health, physical health is one of the components discussed by most participants as needing to be in balance. Similar to mental health, what that physical health looks like will vary based on the individual. However, most individuals discussed food and activity with regards to their sense of physical health. For example, one individual said,

“I would just say feeling healthy, being okay with your own body and working out regularly. Like whatever that be. I'm not, not saying it's go to gym three times a week, four times a week or stuff like that but just kind of active and making sure that your body is healthy and that you feel healthy, like eating the right things and stuff like that.”

Again, one can see a sense of balance even within one of the components of physical health. Rather than taking physical health to the extremes of needing to work out a particular number of times per week, it is about fueling and moving one's body in a way that makes you “feel healthy.” Within the tribal community, a return to our historical food sources is an emphasized component of cultural revitalization. While this may or may not be directly related to this person's response, it is important to note as other individuals might internalize this return to traditional food sources as a promotion of health. Another participant corroborates this claim by saying *nahi-mehtoseeniwinki* is, “obviously physically -- taking care of yourself, eating well, working out.” As such, it is clear that food and physical activity are critical aspects of physical health.

However, in addition to diet and exercise, others posit that taking care of one's physical body also involves substances (or lack of substance use). Here, this participant said:

“I don't know, like drinking water. I feel like a not very healthy person. I don't know. I feel like -- it doesn't ever have to really -- in my mind it doesn't ever have to do with the actual diet that you eat. I feel like it's being aware of what you're putting into your body. So, living well always means more to me like not abusing substances versus like dieting and exercise and things like that.”

Therefore, any substances that enter one's body are also a component of physical health. Moreover, several participants also mentioned sleeping habits as part of physical health, indicating that they are feeling their best when they are able to sleep regular hours and for enough time to rest and recover their bodies. In conclusion, physical health is a multifaceted concept that many *myaamia* individuals identified as important for *nahi-mehtoseeniwinki*.

***Weekiwiteehioni* ‘mindfulness.’** Interestingly, a component of *nahi-mehtoseeniwinki* that was discussed by multiple participants (mentioned 14 times by 7 different participants) was mindfulness. For *myaamiaki*, this can be thought of as *weekiwiteehioni* ‘mindfulness’ and is defined as having a calm mind and not hurrying in the things that one does. The ways in which participants discussed this trait was variable, but all included discussion of intentionally slowing down their fast-paced life to live in the moment. For example, one participant said, “there is value in that even if it's just pausing in your busy schedule to sit down and not be involved in technology and TV and iPads and all the other noise in our lives. A lot of that is just noise unfortunately, good or bad. That's been my experience.” Interestingly, the concept of *weekiwiteehioni* is associated with the *myaamia* value of wisdom, and this participant happened to be the oldest participant that was interviewed. However, other individuals discussed mindfulness in relation to the management of mental health concerns, but as a standalone concept. One individual said, “well me personally, I have depression and anxiety so life is hard sometimes man. But mostly just trying to enjoy the moment...I also find that when I'm around Tribe people that becomes a lot easier.” This person notes that it is easier to be mindful when around other *myaamiaki*, potentially indicating that this is a trait that is associated with the *myaamia* culture for them.

***Weeyaakiteheeciki* ‘They are happy.’** The last theme that emerged from the data regarding what it means for them to live well was having a sense of happiness in their life. This happiness pertains to life in general, to careers, or to participating within the *myaamia* community. For example, one participant mentioned, “I think it is to be happy wherever you are. Obviously healthy but like living happy and doing something that you feel good about and confident and feel like you have a purpose, you know helping others I guess is how I

would describe living well.” In this case, happiness is related to confidence and having a purpose in life.

Interestingly, one person who has more experience with the language and culture than most other participants (based on self-report and knowledge of researcher) interpreted this question a bit differently than other individuals. The phrase *nahi-mehtoseeniwinki*, which I used as part of the question, literally translates to “live properly.” Instead of thinking of this in terms of health, this individual described what it means to be a good person and how to strive to be a better person. They said:

“Some people in the community want to take different aspects of the language and the culture and take it as their own and others are not as interested in it. Some people are very interested in the crafts and the arts and the ribbonwork type of thing not so much interested in the language. That's fine if that is what makes them be a better person, be a person that they enjoy being. I really support that. For me being a good person is about being happy, enjoying what you do and being around good people.”

As such, for individuals with more knowledge about the language and culture, this question could possibly be interpreted differently. Happiness emerges as an important component of living well and having a proper life.

Question 2: How do myaamiaki understand (themes/values) *Wihsakacaakwa* stories?

The *myaamia* value system is woven throughout the stories that are told at the Winter Gathering event. It is important to understand the themes and values that *myaamiaki* draw from *aacimoona* because this is one of the few methods through which *myaamiaki* are exposed to these values, albeit implicitly. Importantly, the themes and values presented here are not in any way all-encompassing of all those present in the stories and the stories are designed in such a way that individuals are to infer messages based on their own understanding of the world. Furthermore, these stories are fluid and ever-changing and, as

such, these themes are not intended to be presented as orthodox, but rather as a glimpse into the ways in which *myaamiaki* understand these themes and values at one point in time.

Table 3

Results of Question 2

How do <i>myaamiaki</i> understand themes/values of <i>wihsakacaakwa</i> stories?		
<p>Importance of Relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Care for others • Reciprocity • Obligations to Family • Respect • Hospitality 	<p>Humor</p>	<p>Be True Self/Identity</p>

Importance of relationships. The first and most frequently cited theme to emerge from the data regarding themes and values understood in *wihsakacaakwa* stories was the importance of relationships. This value manifests differently for different participants, but emerges as the primary theme that individuals understand within these winter stories. The importance of relationships was mentioned in one of the following ways by all 15 participants a total of 41 times throughout the interviews. These themes are presented in order of most frequently mentioned to least frequently mentioned, with no implications as to how central these are to *myaamiaki* as a whole.

Care for others. *Myaamiaki* place significance on their ability to care for other individuals who are important to them. In the interviews, individuals discussed that the stories convey the need to care about family, elders, children, and those that we care about. This need to care for others extends both inside and outside the *myaamia* community. At times, individuals understand that caring for others is important by taking lesson from what *wihsakacaakwa* did not do in his life. For example, on participant said:

“You need to have money to sustain yourself and although maybe he [wihsakacaakwa] doesn’t treat the people in his life very well at times, I think he might still really care about them in the end because he doesn't ever really harm them to -- their death -- pretty close sometimes but... So maybe just caring about the ones you love...”

This shows that even though *wihsakacaakwa* did not always treat those in his life well, it still emerges as an important theme for *myaamiaki* within these stories. Additionally, above other groups mentioned in the interviews, elders were described as some of the most important individuals in one’s life that need to be taken care of. One individual said, “What are some of the values? Well in the little that I know about this character and the stories in which this character figures, there are always elders and it is about taking care of the elders.” This reflect the importance that *myaamia* individuals place on caring for those that are older and presumably wiser because of their lived experiences.

Reciprocity. *Myaamia* individuals also discussed a sense of importance of the relationships with all created beings. However, differently from simply caring for others, many individuals discussed a sense of reciprocity in the world that is important to respect and engage with. This reciprocity emerges as the give and take within our environment that each being that has been created contributes to. For example, one person said:

“There is a reciprocal relationship you need to have with everything, all creation really. The understanding that it will always come off balance but you always -- it

will always go this way or that way but when that happens you need to bring it back in some way... That idea that we as humans are vulnerable and we rely upon other people and the plant world and the animal world. We rely upon all those.”

Therefore, in this instance, underlying the theme of reciprocity is the idea that at times, one person might need to take more than they can give, but the rest of the beings in the environment should adjust to keep the system in balance. Also, underlying this is the thought that more than just humans are important in this reciprocal relationship. Humans, animals, plants, etc. are all interconnected because of the reliance upon the natural world and therefore all must work to maintain this sense of balance. Interestingly, this theme is also interconnected with the question about living well as a sense of balance emerged in that arena as well. Another individual discussed reciprocity in terms of the impact that one has on other beings:

“But we also see reciprocity. I think that that is the part that we often don't reflect on. Actions have consequences and there is reciprocity, reciprocal relations to that. There are people we may have interacted with and we may not be aware that we've said things or done things that have impacted them positively or negatively.”

This individual identified that the ways we interact with other beings in the world might impact those beings, leaving our mark as that interaction then might further influence how that being interacts with others. While this person only identified humans as part of this reciprocity, this also is involved in other arenas as well. As a supplementary example, if an individual takes all of the wild onions in an area, that leaves less for another animal that might need those wild onions for survival and influences their actions moving forward. This simple act of taking the onions influences the entire ecosystem and the sense of balance that is maintained.

Obligations to family. In addition to the general caring for others and a sense of reciprocity, individuals also discussed the importance of upholding one's obligations to

family. Similar to the caring for others, this is often learned through the failure of *wihsakacaakwa*, for example one individual said, “and obligations to family -- which he mostly violates, but he reminds us of how important that is.” Furthermore, some discussed being there for their family through the ups and downs in life. For example, this individual said:

“I think maybe stuff with family because he does have relatives, like in the one Blind Man story. Apparently, his grandfathers -- I think is what it is. Like how to treat your family. So, let's say my family is going through a rough time or we're going through a great time but those can be reflected in *Wiihsakacaakwa*.”

In this instance, the character *wihsakacaakwa* taught this individual to be supportive of their family, and also taught them how to treat their family. In sum, responses from participants emphasized that obligations to family are important and should always be honored. It is also important to note that each family's need is different and that the commonality between families is fulfilling those obligations.

Obligations to family is one of the first themes that emerged out of observations while at the Winter Gathering. At the storytelling even in particular, attendees were sitting in affiliation groups, but particularly within family groups. This understanding of family or kinship is a bit broader than is understood in the greater US culture; *myaamiaki* consider all individuals within the tribe as relation. However, family groups tied by a common grandparent or sibling were seen sitting alongside one another at the event. While at the less formal portion in which individuals were playing games, individuals were using kinship terms to speak to one another including *iishši* ‘younger sibling,’ *nimihsa* ‘elder sister,’ and *iihseensa* ‘elder brother.’ These are the addressing form of kinship terms that indicate a level of respect for the family relationships. While the family obligations themselves were not

explicitly addressed, it is understood that sitting with one's family and using respectful kinship terms are important methods of interacting within a family setting.

Respect. Present within the stories is a sense of respect within one's relationships. Interestingly, respect seemed to be implied in each of the other themes pertinent to the importance of relationships, but also emerged as its' own distinct theme. Here, the importance is on the caution one should take when interacting with the world or in honoring the abilities of other individuals. One individual replied to a question about values in *wiihsakacaakwa* stories by saying these stories are about, "respect, a lot, for people and for nature and how you use things." Other individuals provided more detail. For example, one individual said:

"He did the really stupid thing tying the thing around his waist with the ducks. I feel like that was a cautionary tale. You need to respect the earth. It is only there not in surplus but when you need it. And if you don't, then you, you know, fly and fall and all that kind of stuff."

This particular story she is referencing taught her that there are consequences for not respecting the earth and, subsequently, that respect for the earth and the environment is a value for *myaamia* people. Furthermore, when that respect is extended to individuals, it is about honoring their knowledge and abilities. For example, another person said:

"But then learning even from the stories, I'm thinking about the one where they told about the two old blind men and how he comes in and he cares for them but then he plays the tricks on them. And in the end of course the old men kind of win the day in that particular story. So at the end it is like 'You're not older and wiser.' The older and wiser -- your experience will win out in the end if you're trying to match wits with them."

In this instance, this individual is discussing the need to respect the wisdom of the elders. This teaches an individual both to respect the knowledge and ability of the elders as well as teaching individuals that respect influences the roles that individuals hold within the

community. By not trying to “match wits” with the elders, this individual might play a different role than the elders and that respect is key to the establishment of those roles.

The “storytelling 101” presentation by George Ironstrack emphasized respect within the storytelling setting. Because the presentation was primarily for those who have limited exposure to storytelling, he emphasized the importance of the stories for *myaamiaki* and the level of respect one must bring to the stories themselves. He indicated that they are not like bedtime stories that are often told to children, but rather have importance for our people. Ultimately, this is a means for both setting cultural norms and communicating intercultural respect. In addition, he described the reasons why *myaamiaki* do not tell stories when it is not the correct season. This is out of respect for the characters who are in those stories who happen to be dormant or sleeping during the winter time. Therefore, the concept of respect of other individuals was highlighted as the core of the message of the “storytelling 101” presentation. This set the stage for all the individuals who were in attendance at the storytelling later that night.

Hospitality. The last theme that emerged as a subcategory of the importance of relationships was, as one individual put it, “a lot of hospitality, how you are supposed to treat others.” Hospitality emerged distinctly from the subtheme of ‘caring for others’ because it is about how one treats guests *in the home* rather than simply providing care and support for other people generally. For instance, one individual said:

“Then also how you should treat guests. There is a very strong ethic that I actively try and teach my children about the respect of and the place of guests in your home. There is nothing more important than when a guest comes than proper care for your guest. In that story, he constantly fails to feed his guests, to care for them properly, in large part because he is doing it really without his wife's assistance.”

Again, we see this message emerging through the failures of *wiihsakacaakwa*, but is also an important theme that emerges from many of the stories. The referenced story here, *wiihsakacaakwa* visits many friends and invites them to his home. There is a sense of repetition in which this failure to care for others when he invites them to his home happens several times (depending on who tells the story and what friends are included). This repetition places an emphasis on the theme and that is reflected in the data from the interviews.

In living up the value of hospitality, this became clear in the actions of *myaamiaki* at the event, particularly in relation to the lunch/dinner portion. The tribal leaders who prompted when it was time to share a meal reminded the group every time that our elders and guests are the first to get their food. As *myaamiaki* it is important for to respect one's elders, but also to be hospitable to any guests we might have. Therefore, they are asked to take their food first so that it is ensured that there is enough food to feed the friends that join in the celebrations.

Humor. While the importance of relationships emerged as the most robust theme regarding the themes and values that individuals draw from *Wiihsakacaakwa* stories, humor was also identified as key within these stories. Humor was mentioned directly as a theme in *wiihsakacaakwa* stories nine times by five different participants. Individuals recognize that this character is fun-loving and enjoys their life to the fullest. One participant noted:

“I think the part that -- well, don't forget that humor is such a part of that. It's time to not take yourself so seriously and realize that we are always *wiihsakacaakwa* in lots of different ways. I think that if you can do that, if you can put yourself in that role – ‘I'm *wiihsakacaakwa* too’ -- maybe I can't shapeshift but...”

In this case, the participant explained that because this character is intended to be a representation of *myaamiaki*, the humorous acts that they do are helpful for allowing us not

to take life too seriously. This implies that part of being *myaamia* is utilizing humor throughout various roles we are in as a member of the community. Interestingly, humor was also identified as one of the few themes that seems to transcend developmental levels and is important for everyone in the community from toddlers to elders. For example, one participant said, “for kids it's a humorous story, but as you grow up to be an adult it has other influences in your life like humor and coming in contact with other individuals or other people asking you what is your religion and things like that.” They mentioned that themes that emerge from these stories are simply humor as a child and eventually grow into more. While I will talk about this maturation of view in question three, this highlights that humor is a theme that is understood by all. Children might not understand the more abstract or deep themes that adults understand in these stories, but they do understand the humor. Therefore, *myaamiaki* are exposed to humor throughout their entire lives.

Humor was evident throughout the entire day in observation. During the gaming portion of the day, people playing the games could be seen telling one another jokes. For example, participants were playing *seensewinki* ‘the bowl game’ in which they flip pieces within a bowl. There are 8 pieces total with 6 plain and 2 “special” pieces that are often carved into the shape of an animal. The pieces are painted one color on one side and either left plain or painted a different color on the other side. Different combinations of ways the pieces land, based on their combinations of colors and ratio of plain versus special pieces, indicates how many points one gets. However, there is only one combination that automatically wins the game. When a participant flipped the pieces on their second turn and got a game-winning combination, they said *niilaahka teehši niiši iišileniaani* ‘I’m the only one who can do that’ which is a line from a *wihsakacaakwa* story that is quite humorous.

This use of this line was very funny for the *myaamia* participants. After the laughter died down, the non-*myaamia* participants asked what was funny. The line was explained to that person in a similar way as was just described and then they said “You’ll definitely hear that story tonight.” While that particular story was not actually told that night, there were many other stories that were humorous. In particular, there is a story in which a crayfish pinches another character on the anus. The storyteller who told this story acted out this portion of the story which resulted in laughter from the audience. Even when the story was told in *myaamiataweenki*, many people laughed (despite likely not being able to follow every *myaamia* word) because they knew what that action was in reference to. It is clear from the interactions of *myaamiaki* at this event, that humor is woven into most interactions between *myaamia* people.

Be self/True identity. The last theme that emerged from the data was the theme of being yourself. This theme is related to ensuring that you are not trying to be like other people and to value your own strengths as a person and living according to those. For example, one individual said:

“I see a lot of being yourself and not trying to do what other people do. There are stories where he's mimicking everybody and it just never works out. Today it's like it's saying maybe don't try to be what everybody else is because there is difference in the world and you are one of those differences.”

This person highlights the value of differences between individuals in the community and the importance of using those differences for good. Part of this means to be oneself and not just trying to do what others are doing for the sake of competition or insecurity. Rather, being oneself is identified as beneficial on both the individual and community level.

Question 3: What is the relationship between *Wiihsakacaakwa* stories and individual understanding of living well?

In conceptualizing the ways individuals learn from storytelling events, it became clear that there are two components to this question: content and process. Not only do people pull themes from the stories and apply those themes to their life, but the process of telling these stories might also influence how individuals implicitly understand how to live well. Therefore, the themes that emerged will be broken down into both parts in the following section.

Question 3a: In what ways does the *content* from *Wiihsakacaakwa* stories help individuals to live well?

First, the content from myaamia stories might help individuals to live well because they are taking the lessons they are learning from these stories and applying them to their everyday interactions and experiences. Individuals learn how to live well from these stories by applying the themes and values to their everyday life. For example, they might take the theme of reciprocity from a story and recognize that they should give back to someone who has done something nice for them. Because this mechanism is paralleled to the themes that exist in the stories, it was expected that the responses to these questions regarding the application of the content in their everyday lives would mirror the themes that emerged in question 2. Many of the themes that emerged were, in fact, interconnected with the themes from question 2; however, there were also some unique themes that emerged as well.

Table 4

Results of Question 3a

In what ways does the content from <i>wihsakacaakwa</i> stories help individuals to live well?			
How to be a good person	Reciprocity	What <i>not</i> to do <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not be arrogant • Not be selfish • Not be foolish 	Mental Health <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mindfulness • Happiness • Tolerate ambiguity/complexity

How to be a good person. The first theme to emerge was a general understanding of how to be a good person. *Nahi-mehtoseeniwinki* literally translates to ‘living well’ or ‘living properly’ and, therefore, is rather intuitive that this emerged as a theme. For example, one participant said:

“I think inherently that teaches you, gives you a broad perspective of how to be a good person... For a night of storytelling you have the storyteller up there telling this string of *Wiihsakacaakwa* stories. If you listen to all of them... you are going to get a general sense... how to be a good person, or how not to be a bad person.”

For this individual, the stories generally teach people how to be good. While they did not directly elaborate on *how* to do that, they did discuss generally some of the themes such as caring for others, respect, and obligations for family. Another participant mentioned, “that [story] reminds us that humility is really key to living in a proper way. That's a key value I take.” For this individual, humility is identified specifically as a means for living properly.

Interestingly, both of these participants have been exposed to language and cultural revitalization closely. Similarly, all 3 of the participants who mentioned that the content of these stories helps individuals learn how to live properly or be a good human are all extensively involved within the community. This might indicate that the language helps these individuals to understand the phrase *nahi-mehtoseeniwinki* on a different level due to linguistic knowledge.

Reciprocity. Similar to the prior question regarding the themes that emerged from the stories, the topic of reciprocity emerged as a theme that individuals actually take from the stories to apply in their everyday lives. However, this was thought of a bit differently in this context as people understand that this within their place in time. Rather than just being a concept that exists theoretically, they can begin to understand it in terms of the cause and effect of the actions they take. For instance, one participant mentioned:

“I think the idea of reciprocity -- I guess there are a lot of instances of that kind of giving back and forth. And if you don't do that there are repercussions for that, whether you immediately experience that or if it is somewhere -- who knows how many years down the road? It could be months, years, decades and then like oh. I think it's the same thing. When something happens, then "Oh it's kind of like that story." That helps to inform you I guess.”

They identified that the universe will give reciprocal repercussions if an individual violates the give and take of the natural world. Now, this individual specifically identified that the stories help them to recognize when this is occurring and inform them, potentially for future practical use. Additionally, another individual took a particular wolf story and applied it to the relationship between the *myaamia* and the Pokagen people (a band of the Potawatomi nation; several members from this band were in attendance at the 2018 Winter Gathering).

This individual said:

“I’ll go back to the wolf thing, the concept of knowing your abilities, knowing your relationship with someone and the deeper history behind that relationship and how that relationship could even come about. Then how you can grow from that and share experiences... Yeah, I was thinking the Pokagens that were right there. I was thinking like yeah, like that. We can think of our history, how that brought us together, what it means and how we interact and then how we can carry that out in the future or something.”

In this case, this individual was able to take a specific story and identify how the concept of reciprocity might influence the ways in which *myaamiaki* and the Pokagen people currently interact and will be able to interact in the future. The entire goal of this, according to this person, would be how both parties can grow from the reciprocal relationship. Ultimately, this will contribute to living well for this particular participant, but also for the broader *myaamia* community and even Indian Country.

What not to do. *Wiihsakacaakwa* stories teach people how to be a good person, but also individuals learn vicariously through the faults of this character in what not to do. Participants identified that this particular character is humorous and does foolish and arrogant things, often resulting in negative consequences. As such, individuals learn how *not* to behave by listening to these stories. For example, one participant indicated:

“Yeah. I still associate him -- not wholly but still a large part of me still associates him with doing stupid shit and maybe after doing something stupid I’ll be like, ‘Aw, it’s probably something *Wiihsakacaakwa* would have done and I probably shouldn’t have done that.’ ”

Therefore, people are able to recognize when their behavior resembles that of *Wiihsakacaakwa* and think about what that might mean for their lives. Ultimately, it would be beneficial if these individuals would think about this behavior prior to engaging in it for living well, and it is important to recognize the process involves making less wise decisions at times. Within the concept of learning what not to do from *Wiihsakacaakwa*, there are three primary lessons people learn: not to be arrogant, selfish, or foolish.

Not being arrogant. The character of *Wiihsakacaakwa* is often arrogant, boasting about his unique ability to engage in particular behaviors. Participants noted the impact this might have on their own engagement with others, particularly thinking about ways to ensure that they are not being arrogant. This emerged both through talking about *not* being arrogant or, conversely, about being humble. In particular, this was mentioned by five individuals a total of six times. One example is an individual who said:

“I think throughout *wiihsakacaakwa*, he's always thinking almost like about himself in how he interacts with other people. But he, for the most part, has himself in the forefront. So if the people -- I'm not saying that to be conceited or arrogant or anything like that, but if they are concerned with themselves and how their body is and making sure that everything that they need is met, then they can usually live out their life -- whereas putting others first all the time, it can sometimes be a drain on your wellbeing.”

This arrogance lends itself to interpersonal problems in the stories at times, ultimately helping individuals to recognize that arrogance might not be the best approach to life. For this individual, that understanding of not being arrogant was applied to body image. However, others talked more broadly about arrogance or humility.

Not being selfish. Additionally, *Wiihsakacaakwa* often considers himself as the most important person in the immediate environment. In Freudian terms, he acts under the impulses of the id at times. This life lesson teaches individuals not to be selfish and to consider others' needs in addition to one's own. For example, one participant said:

“That's what I think a lot about the *wiihsakacaakwa* story where he goes visiting. He doesn't think about the fact that what *kwaahkwa* can do is different than what he can do. He sees a friend that has a very good skill or ability and he wants that skill or ability rather than the relationship with that person, the give and take or reflect on what he can for the friend. So I think there's a lot about relationships and inabilities both good and bad in the stories of *wiihsakacaakwa* -- and can influence.”

In this case, the character's selfishness is seen through his desire to take the skill/ability from their friend over his desire to help out his friend. This also intersects with responsibilities to

others and reciprocity as *wiihsakacaakwa* fails to provide for his friends due to this selfishness. In the end, individuals seem to learn from this negative consequence that selfishness is not a quality that should be emulated.

Not being foolish. Furthermore, *Wiihsakacaakwa* as a character also generally acts foolish throughout many of the stories. Participants identified this as a trait that is predominant in the content of the stories and that this is something that we, as humans, should not do. For example, one participant said:

“When you hear those stories and you hear him acting as a fool or not being respectful, being mean and all those kinds of things -- if you don't understand that, then that is also reflected in that well being -- that we should take care of elders or you shouldn't lust after your daughters and all those kinds of things.”

In this instance, the participant discusses the impact that being foolish (and disrespectful) can have on one's well-being. While being foolish adds to the humor of these stories, this trait is generally seen as less desirable for *nahi-meehtoseeniwinki*. However, this is not always the case as the foolishness can also teach individuals not to take life too seriously. For example, one participant indicated, “...you know he's big and puffing out his chest, a fool, he reminds us that we think things are so momentous but they might be nothing, not amount much to spit. Sometimes he does the stupidest, smallest thing and it is a really big, important thing.” Here, the foolishness helps individuals to understand that we often overdramatize the importance of some things in our life. Here, one can see the multifaceted nature of the lessons that emerge from *Wiihsakacaakwa* stories as what one individual takes as a negative can be seen by another individual as a positive lesson.

Mental health. Mental health emerged as a general theme from the *Wiihsakacaakwa* stories, and also emerged as one component of the content of the stories that aids individuals on their journey of living well. In particular, there were three subthemes that describe

specifically how the stories aid individuals in living well. Mindfulness, happiness, and tolerating ambiguity make up the mental health component. While some of these subthemes (e.g., mindfulness) also arose as a theme for the question about the themes that emerged from the stories, there were distinct differences in how these concepts aid in living well.

Mindfulness. *Weekiwiteehioni* ‘mindfulness’, in question two was a simple theme that individuals identified within the stories. However, when individuals are applying this concept to their lives and, in particular, how it helps them to live well, the understanding was a bit more complex. Individuals explained mindfulness within their interpersonal relationships, everyday life, and as a tool for coping with difficulties. One individual shared an example of how they use *weekiwiteehioni* for their interpersonal relationships, indicating:

“It means paying attention to it as you're going through your life. I think it's part of it, that when you reflect on *wihsakacaakwa* as this cultural hero/trickster kind of person, you can't go through life absentmindedly either. You need to pay attention to the people around you and be conscious that not everybody necessarily feels safe, secure and respected.”

Here, the individual is identifying that awareness of one’s own *and* others’ reactions to the environment are important for creating a safe environment. Ultimately, this is important for individuals who are trying to demonstrate respect and have in-group cooperation.

Happiness. In addition to mindfulness, happiness again emerged as a theme that aids individuals in living well. As opposed to simply being a value within the stories, individuals indicated that the content of the stories helps them to realize that happiness is crucial for mental health. For example, one participant reported: “I guess I kind of changed my definition of mental health -- but he [*wihsakacaakwa*] has to combat certain situations and use his intellect, which is awesome. But then he also is having fun with it, so I guess that you have to be happy in doing things that you are doing.” In this instance, by connecting the

themes from the stories with living well, they changed their definition of what mental health means (they identified this as a component of living well earlier in the interview). In particular, using intellect and being happy were added to their understanding of mental health. Several individuals identified that the goofiness that *wiihsakacaakwa* demonstrates helps them to have fun and be happy in their everyday lives. At times, they will stop and think about this character, ultimately leading to a laugh or a smile.

Tolerate ambiguity/complexity. The first unique theme within the mental health realm is the ability to tolerate ambiguity or complexity in life. Participants discussed that the content of the stories causes them to struggle with defining the character which, ultimately, is against the point of the stories. One individual said:

“Also, at least initially I thought he was complicated, but now as I'm realizing more and more he's not complicated, he's just human, or a reflection of human. Okay he's just whatever the storyteller wants him to be. That's not complicated but we don't know what to expect, which is the fun part of it. That helped me with oh how do I put my finger on *Wiihsakacaakwa*? How do I say this is who he is? What does he look like? What does he do? It's like no, he's whatever you need him to be.”

This individual was attempting to describe *wiihsakacaakwa*, which is ultimately trying to describe humanity as they identified that he is a reflection of human. In the end, they were able to recognize that this attempt of “putting a finger on” the character was against the point of the stories. Rather, the point is to wrestle with the unknown and figure out how to apply the lessons to one’s own experiences. Another participant said:

“Some of that is informed by my understanding of how he or the beings similar to him with different names in other languages talk about him too -- he's human but he's not human. He's both but he's neither. He has all the not so great and the great things about what makes us humans. He's very selfish but then also generous at the same time. You know?”

This struggling with defining and understanding the complex character was identified as important for helping individuals to do the same with those things they don’t understand in

their everyday lives. Additionally, through the responses of participants, it becomes clear that *wiihsakacaakwa* stories give parallels for how to think about and cope with the loss of language and culture. For example, individuals discussed a sense of promise, hope, and excitement that comes with the language and cultural revitalization movement, but also a sense of loss, grief, and anger. *Wiihsakacaakwa* helps individuals understand that the good and the bad can exist simultaneously and that one doesn't have to understand it fully in order to accept it or be at peace with it. This is a reflection of how our ancestors and community knowledge culminates in artistic prowess. Therefore, participants noted that we won't understand everything in our environments as humans and to be okay with that, rather than getting angry or frustrated over it.

Question 3b: In what ways does the process of storytelling help individuals to live well?

In addition to the content of the stories providing life lessons and values that individuals may apply to their everyday lives, the *process* of storytelling can also assist individuals with the development of skills or values to aid in living well. While this is something that is not explicitly talked about in community settings, it is an aspect of community gatherings that might be internalized by individuals of the community and may impact the ways in which they go about their daily lives. Therefore, in this study, it was my goal to examine this possibility. The following are some of the aspects of the process of storytelling that individuals reported in their journey of living well.

Table 5

Results of Question 3b

In what ways does the <i>process</i> of storytelling help individuals to live well?		
Community building/connection	Cultural norms and expectations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kids in front • Developmental differences • Differences from Western stories 	Breathing life into story <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better understanding • Different interpretations • Convey community messages

Community building and connection. The primary way in which the process of storytelling improves living well for participants was through community building and forming connections within the community. Individuals identified that the process of simply gathering as a people exemplifies what it means to live well for *myaamiaki*. For example, one participant mentioned:

“The process of getting a hundred or so people to come together and socialize and hang out for a day is in and of itself a good way because it revolves around good things. We're not coming together for something bad but for something fun and to socialize and meet each other and see each other again. I think the process is that coming together and being together helps reinforce being well and living well.”

This person mirrors the *myaamia* philosophy that living well is about the promotion of the positive aspects of life/culture rather than trying to avoid or prevent the negative aspects from happening. This is an important process that is aided by storytelling. Furthermore, there is a

sense of connection that some individuals mentioned that is unique to storytelling. For example, one participant said:

“There are also just family ties in there. Storytelling always connects people especially when you're in that moment. Even if it is 100 people it's kind of private in the way you feel connected to what is going on in front of you, and so quiet and it's very formal. It's not like you and your friends are talking in your house. It's a deep moment where you are just saturated in the content of the story and you are fully there.”

This individual is alluding to the sense that these stories are sacred in that they have been told for thousands of years by *myaamiaki* and this is “deep” act that helps us to connect with one another, both past and present. Some individuals discussed that the process of storytelling is the closest they get to a religious or spiritual type event. One person said, “Maybe there is this idea of being that is always there but you just don't know what it is. It usually is at all times. It's kind of like a religious idea. I guess other people would compare it to that. People have asked me and it's hard to explain.” The process of storytelling is something that satisfies that aspect of individuals’ lives in a unique manner.

On the other hand, two individuals distinctly mentioned that while this community building aspect of storytelling is great, that some individuals value this community building at the expense of learning and practicing the stories within their own families and communities. In particular, one participant said:

“So that the community is not dependent on organized events to continue to advance their own understanding of the stories, the individual understanding. That right now is the thing that I do in storytelling, but hopefully all the other storytellers are watching and learning so that when I'm not there other people can also set the proper context and engage the community in that active, collective reflection.”

In this instance, the participants who expressed this concern weren’t arguing against the concept of community building as a benefit of the storytelling process, but rather expressing that this might also present some challenges for the community if not paid attention to.

Throughout the day of the “storytelling 101,” gaming, and the storytelling event itself, community building was intentionally incorporated into the events. First, the pairing of individuals from Miami University with *myaamiaki* helped them to feel more like a part of the community (even though they aren’t members). Additionally, the gaming itself was an informal method of using cultural activities to help bring people together. The *mahkisina* ‘moccasin’ game itself is built specifically for community building. The game involves two teams, one is the team that is “hiding” and the other is the team that is “finding.” There are 4 moccasins placed in the middle (today played with fabric rather than moccasins for sanitary purposes) and the hiding team hides 4 marbles under the moccasins. Three of the marbles are white and one is black. The point of the game is for the finding team flips over the fabric pieces to show which marble is underneath. In particular, the finder wants to find the black marble on their third guess in order to win the full points and the chance to hide. If the black marble is found on the second flip, they get half points, and if it is found on the first or last flip, the hiding team gets points. The hiding team likes to fool the finding team with special tricks and sometimes by not even knowing where the marble is (so their face doesn’t give it away). However, every player plays differently, which requires you to get to know the individuals who you are playing with in order to beat them. The game is constructed in a way to foster community building. Ultimately, the storytelling event is in itself a community building event because it brings *myaamiaki* together every year by sharing cultural traditions (gaming, stories, dancing).

Cultural norms and expectations. Furthermore, the process of storytelling helps to convey the cultural norms and expectations of *myaamiaki*. One participant mentioned, “I feel like it's just a general basis in what is expected.” This setting of expectations refers to

the expectations for how to engage at the storytelling events or even more generally the ways in which *myaamia* people engage in a community setting. As such, this process of getting people together helps individuals to feel more comfortable because they understand the norms of the group. Additionally, some individuals mentioned that telling the stories in particular contexts, time periods, or locations might change the meaning of the story. In this case, the content of the story itself is not teaching a method but rather the process of telling a particular story in a particular context sends a unique message. One participant mentioned: “They'll convey these really deep, heavy big lessons or commentaries on something in a very funny, what we would call today irreverent but at the time it's not irreverant, right? That's a complete social construction based on culture and cultural norms.” In this case, the act of taking a story that has been told by *myaamiaki* for many years and telling it in a context where some might consider the topic taboo or brazen builds cultural norms within the community. This process engages the community in a manner that is not always possible in social settings.

The intent of the “storytelling 101” presentation given by George Ironstrack was explicitly to build cultural norms. It was targeted at those who have less exposure to the cultural norms so that they can learn the facets of interacting that will help them fit into the group in respectful ways. Some of the norms that were discussed were the expectations of respect for the stories themselves, not telling the stories outside of wintertime, and asking other people questions about things you do not understand. It was clear that George did not want to do the interpretation *for* individuals, but that he wanted them to feel comfortable in having conversations with others to build their understanding of the stories. This cultural norm is seen in the ways in which *myaamiaki* discuss the stories after the event. As a

storyteller, I had someone come up to me after the event and asked why I told a particular portion of the story in a particular way. This question was based on the norm of curiosity and seeking out information to understand the world.

Children in front. At formalized storytelling events, there is often a norm for children to sit in the front of the room so that they can be front-and-center and engage with the storytellers. Numerous individuals, when asked about the process of storytelling, indicated that the children sitting in the front as an impactful norm. For example, one participant said, “my favorite thing is having little kids be there and sit up front, especially if they interact or freak out or anything. That's really fun and I think that's important because keeps that circle going.” This individual referred to the fact that this engages the children from a young age, piquing their interest and keeping them coming to the events (connected with the connection theme above). However, others mentioned the children sitting in the front as setting the stage for the future and valuing individuals from all developmental levels. This is a place where individuals from all ages come together and hear the same messages. For example, one person mentioned:

“Putting the kids in front seems like it's mainly for them sometimes. I mean some of the adults, we get the other, the more humorous points of the story, but the initial acting and the telling of the story -- they get the front row seat. And when there are children who don't sit... [laughing] it's okay. They are still hearing it and they are still exposed to it but they don't have to sit and stare at you. It is an open environment where kids can still be kids. They are not forced to sit and listen but they can if they want. [It] sets the stage for future.”

Here, the person was emphasizing the importance of simply exposing children to the stories, valuing their developmental level as opposed to restricting their behaviors, and allowing them to be set up for future storytelling events. This process in itself helps individuals to feel connected to the youth of the community who are those that are the future of the community.

At the storytelling event, there were 6 children laying up front on blankets. Throughout the stories, storytellers would share character names in *myaamiataweenki* like *papankamwa* ‘fox’ or *mahweewa* ‘wolf’ and would ask the children to translate the word, ultimately engaging the children. Additionally, the children would move around on the floor, roll around, and in some cases even get up and run around the whole room. With the latter, there was even one instance in which the child was picked up by a storyteller as they completed the story. This ultimately showed that the youth are connected to the event in their own way and permitted to be themselves, developmentally. In addition, it demonstrates the importance of teaching values and how to live properly to youth. They are more likely and able to absorb the themes of the stories when they are interacting with the stories and storytellers closely.

Developmental differences. Similarly, the individuals reported that the process of storytelling emphasizes that each person is going to interpret stories differently based on their developmental stage. Not only that they will interpret it differently but that those different interpretations are important and valued by other community members. For example, one participant said:

“And I also think with wellbeing, just watching the people at the storytelling. Like my favorite -- last year watching the kids, all of them sitting, all attentively and listening and seeing what lessons they can learn throughout the stories and like myself seeing the perspective of the story whereas a six, seven, eight-year-old seeing how that story goes and what lessons they learned from that, that's always interesting.”

In this case, the person is reminded that they are interpreting the story differently than young children and, presumably, differently than elders in the community. Inherent to this is the process of observing others and taking in the behaviors and engagement that other individuals visibly demonstrate at these events. This observation promotes social and

interpersonal awareness that also aids in their process of living well. While it was unclear through observation of how developmental differences influenced individuals' understandings of the stories, there were individuals of all different ages at the event, ranging from infants to elders.

Differences from Western stories. A major part of the process of storytelling is the sometimes jarring realization of how different these stories are from Western stories. Because many *myaamia* individuals are embedded within American culture before they are exposed to *myaamia* culture, they are already socialized to a particular type of story that has a beginning, middle, and end with a linear structure. Upon hearing *myaamia* stories, they often express a discomfort with a cyclical and episodic story structure. For example, one person said,

“Our stories in terms of the narrative don't follow a normal, traditional, European-Western-American sort of narrative. They are all over the place and all of a sudden you have these gigantic drooling heads of your mothers trying to eat you. So what you're grasping is a lot of different imagery that you're not familiar with along with narrative patterns that you're not familiar with. You can't anticipate where that story is going upon its first hearing. They are really fun stories. Keeps you on your toes.”

This person had some vivid language to describe the ways in which they were shaken by the stories and how the process of not being able to anticipate the ending of the stories is fun and spontaneous. Other individuals talked about this difference in a different way, for example:

“Because as Americans we're used to traditional stories where like this is a person and this happens and this gets resolved, whereas *Wiihsakacaakwa* stories are more like spontaneous and you don't really know what is going to happen and you don't really know what the outcome is going to be and there is not always a resolution.”

This particular person indicated that they feel somewhat confused because of the lack of resolution. Individuals with more experiences with the storytelling process (i.e., have been listening to and/or telling stories for more time) seemed to report appreciating and

understanding this difference on a personal level and reported recognizing the value in stringing the stories together in particular ways and the nuances that exist in the episodic structure. This process of noting differences between storytelling styles and structures, regardless of who is listening, maintains an introspective aspect to the storytelling that engrains the messages in a way that other storytelling styles can't.

Breathing life into story. When a story is told orally at a formal gathering rather than simply breathing read, the story is often performed. This performance transforms the story and allows the storyteller to act out the story, add emphasis or importance to particular parts, and even add additional components to the story. This was brought up by many of the participants as part of the process of the storytelling gathering. For example, one individual said:

“My friend ... started talking about the spirit of the stories, that there is this spirit that is there. That is why it is so different when you are reading it versus the telling it because -- and like George was saying, you are bringing it to life, you are breathing life into them. There is that. It is so much different. The spirit of the stories is there.”

This process of performing the stories is referred to as “breathing life into the stories.”

People enjoy this because it is much more entertaining, but also because it helps them to live well in three distinct ways: they have a better understanding of community values, they can see others' different interpretations of the story, and community messages are conveyed to the community.

Better understanding. The act of a storyteller “breathing life” into the story helps individuals to gain a better understanding of the messages of the stories than if they are just reading it. The skill that it takes for a storyteller to string together multiple episodes adds different messages and inflections that help the individual to understand the context better.

One participant, in particular, noted:

“It breathed life into that story and made it into a real thing for me. But then last night with George conducting multiple stories, like the one of the monster that made people -- connecting that to the Old Man's tale -- I feel like it definitely changed the outcome of what that story was intended to do. Breaking it apart, he had told both of those stories in class but they were never connected to each other, so I got different morals from them than I did when they were all flowed together.”

Because the person is seeing it performed rather than reading the story, it made it feel real.

This sense of realness allowed the person to understand the story in a different light. For many individuals, when they are the only ones reading the story, they are using their own understanding of the concepts presented and of the world to comprehend the story. However, when an individual is at a storytelling event, they are able to see the ways the performer is demonstrating the story as well as the reactions of the rest of the crowd. This changes the ways in which that person might understand the story. Additionally, this better understanding is important because it tends to help individuals to physically remember the stories better. While a great practice that is encouraged within the community, simply reading the stories often makes it difficult to remember the content of those stories.

However, as one person “mentioned before, sort of observing how the storyteller is saying it at least for me, seeing it sort of acted out imbeds it in my mind. It's like the whole process or whatever, it just engrains it.” This is important for individuals to be able to recall the story, the message of the story, and integrate that with their current situation to make a decision about a behavior or given situation. This is possible with reading the stories as well, but the process of storytelling helps to strengthen this understanding in a practical way.

Different interpretations. Another reason participants mentioned that it is beneficial to see the story performed is because they are able to see different interpretations of the story than they or other storytellers might have. Over the years, different individuals tell the same stories, enabling individuals to gain an understanding of the ways each performer interprets

the story. Even from year to year, the same performer might add different emphases or phrases to the story, changing the way the story might be interpreted. One participant said:

“Many of these stories I would hear in the wintertime and it would be people know the stories a little bit and they would tell them as they knew them. Now it's on a much more official capacity and we have very good storytellers who add their own personal flair to them. I have definitely seen it grow over the years and become more a part of myself and my family as well as the broader community.”

This ability to observe different perspectives is important because it enables flexibility of thought regarding the story as well as change over time. This practice might help individuals to engage in flexibility of thought more generally in their lives. Also, the different interpretations, again, might send different messages about community values. Furthermore, after storytelling events are over, individuals in the community will often talk about the stories and what they got out of them. One individual mentioned: “I always like to talk with people about what they think they got out of the story, or what they got out of the story. You get different perspectives. ‘Oh, maybe I didn't think about him in this way.’ Then I give my input. Sharing those feelings or thoughts kind of help build on my previous thoughts.” This helps to build a community as well as diversifying the ways in which individuals are thinking about the stories. Participants identified that they are developing more complexity with the ways in which they understand the stories by hearing different interpretations.

One way this concept of different interpretations emerged in my observation was through the different levels of animation between each of the stories (and storytellers). Some of the storytellers were particularly animated, whereas others merely recounted the story verbally without acting it out. Additionally, some individuals after the storytelling event had a discussion regarding one storyteller that had changed an aspect of a story from previous years when they told it. In this example, this storyteller told a story about *ecipoonkwia*

‘snapping turtle’ going to war and put in a song that *eecipoonkwia* supposedly sang. This hadn’t been included in previous years, but according to the conversations individuals had, this interpretation added in humor and a different perspective to the song from previous storytelling events. This could impact how individuals understand that particular story, but also simply highlights that different individuals will understand stories differently.

Convey community messages. Because stringing the stories together in different ways might convey different messages or values, the stories can be intentionally used to share a message to the community. For example, one participant said:

“Storytellers talk about assembling those stories in a way that storytellers from other communities outside the Myaamia that maintained unbroken their traditions talk about that a skilled storyteller puts those stories together in a way that communicates a message to their audience that is not a lecture but rather an oblique comment on something going on in the community, either for an individual or for the whole community, that is an attempt to get people to think through on their own, come to their own conclusions, their own intrinsic understanding of whatever this challenge is that the storyteller addresses.”

However, as noted by the participant this stringing together of particular stories to convey a message about the community is not able to be done within the *myaamia* community at the present because of the revitalization process. The act of telling stories in a formal setting has only been recently picked up again, meaning the community is working on increasing the number of stories we are able to tell. Over time, it might be possible to regenerate enough stories to be able to change the meaning on a grand scale and convey community messages. Ultimately, this process could theoretically help individuals to see the accomplishments and downfalls of others and emulate those behaviors within their own lives.

Question 4: How does an individual's development influence their understanding of *Wiihsakacaakwa* stories?

In addition to the stories influencing the individual and the ways in which individuals live well, the individual might also have an impact on the way they understand these stories. In this case, there could be a recursive effect in which the stories influence the individual, but the individual also influences the stories and the way they are interpreted. As such, I was interested in the ways in which an individual's developmental level, broadly defined, might influence the ways they understand these stories.

Table 6

Results of Question 4

How does an individual's development influence their understanding of *wiihsakacaakwa* stories?

Change of view

- Repetition
- Experiences
- Big life events

Change of view. The most prominent theme that emerged from the questions about the impact that development has on individuals' understandings was the idea that over time, their view of the stories changed. In particular, individuals discussed having a simple or

naïve view of the stories when they first heard them. Individuals described a range of emotions when they first heard the stories including humor, frustration, anger, confusion, and apathy. However, over time, it seems as though individuals come to understand the stories on a deeper level. For example, one individual mentioned,

“I mean it's so -- it went from a straight forward ‘I'm enjoying this narrative’ to kind of diverging into really enjoying the art of the storytelling by whoever is telling that story and then enjoying trying to see problems that I'm having right now or just that are going on in the world, politically and stuff like that, how that relate.”

For this particular individual, the stories went from a one-track enjoyment to an ability to interpret the world through the lens of the stories. This transition enabled their environment to enter into their understanding of the stories. When the stories were first told, the politics of 2018 were not possibly imagined as playing a role in the themes. However, they were built to capture universal experiences and help individuals to make sense of and interpret their world. The maturation of view is important in the process of understanding the role an individual’s development might play in their understanding of the stories. However, it is also important to understand the process by which this maturation of view occurs for many individuals.

Repetition. First, one of the ways in which individuals might achieve a maturation of view is through hearing the stories repeatedly throughout their life. More specifically, hearing the stories many times and by different individuals helps them to understand the nuances. For example, one participant mentioned:

“That really comes to you only in the length of time you're spending with him, reading his stories, hearing other people tell *wiihsakacaakwa* stories, seeing other people act out particular scenes -- because every storyteller has their own interpretive lens as they breathe life into him that can subtly or dramatically shift the way in which stories are told. I think that's one way it has changed over time for me, my understanding of it.”

This person identified that the interpretive lens of the storyteller combined with this sense of repetition influenced the ways in which they understand the stories. This is an interesting process because the storytellers' understandings of the stories change over time and there is a difference between storytellers' interpretations of the stories. Therefore, it is important to gain the repetition of hearing the stories because you must see the evolution of one storyteller's interpretation *in addition to* the interpretations of different storytellers in order to increase one's exposure to different perspectives. This becomes a complex process that evolves throughout one's life. Another individual mentioned, "I feel like our stories are so layered that you have to hear them multiple times and you have to read them multiple times. Every time you read them or every time you hear them you're going to catch a little bit more nuanced understanding about what that story is conveying to us." This individual is emphasizing the experience of the change over time that exists (mentioned Change in View) that occurs through being repeatedly exposed to the stories. Because one's life and the environment and events surrounding an individual's life changes, the situations that an individual might apply to the meaning of the stories will also likely change.

This repetition was mentioned in the "storytelling 101" presentation given by George Ironstrack. George highlighted that repetition is what helps us to understand the most important messages or important parts of stories. This also emerged during a story told in the storytelling event. There was one story in which *wiihsakacaakwa* goes visiting his various friends. In this story, the same pattern where *wiihsakacaakwa* goes to visit his friends, enjoys their hospitality, and then fails to reciprocate this hospitality when they visit him happens on numerous occasions. Ultimately, this repetition emphasizes the important

message regarding hospitality and ultimately the repercussions for that inability to be hospitable.

Experiences. Another contributing factor to the ways in which individuals develop another understanding of *wiihsakacaakwa* stories throughout their lifetime is experience. Generally, participants discussed feeling as though living their lives provided them with many more experiences through which they are able to interpret the stories. Because they are hearing the same stories year after year, the general experiences they have in the six-to-eight-month hiatus will influence how they are understanding the stories when they do revisit them in the wintertime. More specifically, many individuals discussed that more experiences with the myaamia community contribute to how they are able to understand the stories. For example, one participant mentioned:

“I'd say kind of when you get together with the Myaamia community and, while you're not always telling specific Winter Time Stories, you're always telling stories of your own experiences. So any time I get together with them and we're always conversing or we go to someone's house or something like that and we create this situation where there are going to be stories told, it creates that bond that I feel like I have with other students and others that I've known for many years through *eewansaapita*. The storytellings both formal and informal create that bond that I've had within the community.”

The bonds and experiences that individuals have with other community members seems to help individuals to understand the stories on a different level. Specifically, this individual emphasized that personal stories are told in adjunct to the winter stories, which help them to understand the stories on a different level. Other participants also discussed the influence that additional life experience, more broadly, has on their understanding of the stories. For example, upon being asked the life events that prompted their change in understanding of *wiihsakacaakwa* stories, one individual said:

“It might have been in my twenties maybe. It probably really came to me when I went back to grad school and I was taking a class on Ojibwe stories. I was with John Nichols who is a linguist and basically, he gave us stories that were all in Ojibwe that were mostly collected by... He was an ethnologist who was Meskwaki. He died in some tragic shipwreck. He had gone to work in the South Pacific and they thought all his books were in the shipwreck and then they found them. Can't remember his name now, but he recorded a lot of Ojibwe stories.”

In this instance, the individual gained life experiences with other communities and with Native scholars. These experiences outside the *myaamia* community helped them to understand the stories in a different light. After discussing the works of many influential scholars, they went on to say, “it really makes you realize our ancestors had the same complex ideas about the universe and what it means to be human, and so much of that is not there anymore. But these stories are little nuggets that are windows into that. They are part of a much bigger thing.” For them, being able to gain experiences within other communities and work in a field they are passionate about gave them a higher level of understanding of the stories themselves. In sum, gaining experiences both within and outside the community help to further individuals’ conceptualization of the messages of the stories. It is important to highlight the cultural value within the *myaamia* community that global knowledge is important for the community itself. In this case, gaining life experiences outside the “*myaamia* knowledge system” was valuable for this individual and ultimately the tribe as a whole.

Big life events. Likewise, individuals reported developing their understanding of *wihsakacaakwa* stories by having big life events take place in the midst of hearing the stories. Individuals seemed to understand that when they have a big life event that happens, they are forced to re-evaluate their understanding of the world generally. This process also happens to make individuals think about the stories in a different manner as well. One

participant said, “probably obstacles in life. Being exposed to the same stories throughout life and interpreting them differently each time.” Therefore, the repetition combined with life events happening helps individuals to revisit the stories from a different life perspective. Another individual, when asked about the types of events or situations that further their understanding of the stories said,

“It's little stuff and then the bigger things. Any kind of loss or difficult situation. I don't think you should think "What would wiihsakacaakwa do?" but you know... Or what would he start to do and then abandon it. That's probably the best. I think it's easy to know that thing that is troubling you isn't new and then it's something everybody faces. But I think -- and I'm speaking again... It's really funny for me to say it like that. People forget that other people have their own experiences but also everybody is going through the same stuff. No one is inventing the loss of a loved one. That's universal.”

This particular participant generally refers to the feeling of loss or other difficult situations and how these instances make them think about the stories in a different way, grounding them in a sense of universality. The difficult situations helped them, in particular, to understand the stories differently because they believe that not only is the character a trickster and a fool, but they are a representation of humanity and represent the self in some ways. Their life events that enabled them to relate to the character developed this understanding. Furthermore, another person said:

“I think becoming a [parent] is one of the big things. I'm trying to think about how I can instill these values into my kids. I look back at it and I feel like my grandfather's generation didn't speak Miami but they were very Miami in how they did things. They were always very generous, all those sorts of things. Being influence by that. This provides another layer to that.”

In this case, the person is looking to the stories to be able to help teach their children how to be a good human and instill values within them. This life event of having children made them evaluate the stories from a different lens, ultimately adding more complexity to their understanding of the stories.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

In this chapter, the perspectives on *myaamia* storytelling, particularly as it pertains to living well, will be discussed and compared to the literature on American Indian health and storytelling. The participants in this study provided a perspective that is unique because of the various identities that each person brought into the interview room, but also because this is a snapshot of a group of people in a particular time in *myaamia* history. The Miami Tribe of Oklahoma is currently in a state where language and cultural revitalization is one of the primary goals of the community. As such, as this is presented, readers should keep in mind that these results could change as the community begins to solidify definitions for the various concepts discussed in this dissertation and as the community further develops its' understanding of stories and *nahi-meehtoseeniwinki*.

Major Findings

The first major finding pertains to the ways in which *myaamia* people view *nahi-meehtoseeniwinki*. It seems as though participants in this study view health holistically and based on a sense of balance in one's life. Instead of thinking of health as various outcomes to be achieved like reducing alcoholism, suicide rates, diabetes, etc., participants think of health in terms of achieving a balance of the various components that contribute to health. This immediately shifts the view of health from a deficit model, in which the goal is to get rid of negative factors within the community, to a strengths-based model in which the focus is on promotion of mental, physical, and spiritual health. Many different participants mentioned balance as a concept central to living well; those that didn't explicitly state the term "balance" did talk about different aspects of health (mental, physical, spiritual,

emotional, etc). Regardless of the use of the term, it became clear that people understand living well as a complex process of maintaining positive decisions within various realms of their lives. This study responds to and offers support for the call by Hodge, Limb, and Cross (2009) to shift from a perception of health as a “Western” tradition that was influenced by colonization and oppression to a story that centers local knowledge systems and promotes balance and harmony. This study builds off this strengths-based paradigm to offer a different perspective than the deficit-based model found in many extant studies on manifestations of health in American Indian communities (Alcántara & Gone, 2007; Borowsky, Resnick, Ireland, & Blum, 1999; Costello, Farmer, Angold, Burns, & Erkanli, 1997; Garrett, Baldrige, Benson, Crowder, & Aldrich, 2015; Halpern, 2007; Herne, Bartholomew, & Weahkee, 2014; Mehl-Madrona, 1999; Shaughnessy, Doshi, & Jones, 2004; Tingey et al., 2017; Wahab & Olson, 2004). Additionally, this model also nicely parallels a sense of resiliency within the tribal community. Richardson (2002) describes the “Garmezy’s triad of resiliency” which implies there are three components to resiliency; this sense of resiliency is comprised of a personality disposition, a supportive family environment, and an external support system (p. 309). While the current study cannot necessarily identify, or connect with, the “personality disposition” referenced here, the current study does show that storytelling creates a supportive family environment as well as an external support system. As such, two of the three components necessary for resilience are promoted through the simple act of storytelling. Particularly based on the ways in which *myaamia* community thinks about *nahi-meehtoseeniwinki*, promoting a thought process informed by what *to do to* live a life that is along the path of wellness seems to be the most beneficial for living well through building resilience.

While these findings are significant because the community has not explicitly discussed the concept of *nahi-meehtoseeniwinki*, there are a few possibilities as to why this holistic view of health has emerged. First, it is possible that *myaamia* families have passed this definition of living well down from generation to generation as the value to hold when thinking about what “health” means. Because values tend to be passed down throughout families (Whitbeck & Gecas, 1988) and family ties have been an important part of maintaining *myaamia* culture, this is a likely explanation. It is also possible that, linguistically, using the term “living well” rather than “health” shifts the ways in which individuals are thinking about this concept. Inherent in this phrase “living well” is the idea that this is a process rather than an outcome. Similarly, because it is “living well” and not “living healthfully” or something similar, this primes an overall sense of wellness. Third, a sense of balance within American Indian health literature is a pan-Indian philosophy that is frequently disseminated throughout scholarship within Indian Country (Dapice, 2006; Eddy, 1974; Kattelman, Conti, & Ren, 2009; Roberts, Harper, Tuttle-Eagle Bull, & Heideman-Provost, 1998; Walker, 2001). In fact, many tribes utilize the medicine wheel when discussing health within their communities, superimposing health values onto directional values within their communities (Roberts, Harper, Tuttle-Eagle Bull, & Heideman Provost, 1998). This philosophical approach to understanding health promotes wholeness and relatedness between all beings in the world (Dapice, 2006). Some tribal members may be exposed to pan-Indian philosophies in the other indigenous spaces they may find themselves in. As such, it is entirely possible that they have adopted these views without using the terminology “medicine wheel” to explain their understanding.

An additional finding within this study is that the values that were expressed by the participants in this study paralleled those that were outlined in the educational efforts, but were not an exact match for how they have been taught in some spaces. There have been formal discussions of the values, particularly as they pertain to the educational efforts within the tribal community (Ironstrack & Baldwin, 2008). Within this, George Ironstrack discusses the values of *eeweentiyankwi* ‘we are all related,’ *peekinaakosiyankwi* ‘we act in a generous manner,’ *aahkohkeelintiyankwi* ‘we care for each other,’ and *paapilweeyankwi* ‘we joke.’ Each of these values was discussed in some capacity within the responses that participants offered as explanations for the values in *wihsakacaakwa* stories. In particular, the themes that were found explicitly in participant responses included the importance of relationships (parallels *eeweentiyankwi*), care for others (parallels *aahkohkeelintiyankwi*), reciprocity (parallels *paapilweeyankwi*), obligations to family (parallels *eeweentiyankwi*), respect (parallels *aahkohkeelintiyankwi*), hospitality (parallels *peekinaakosiyankwi*), humor (parallels *paapilweeyankwi*), and be one’s true self. Of these values discussed, only one does not parallel these values in some way; be one’s true self.

Table 7	
Parallels between Themes and Myaamia Values	
Theme	Value Parallel
Importance of Relationships	<i>eeweentiyankwi</i> 'we are all related'
Care for Others	<i>aahkohkeelintiiyankwi</i> 'we care for each other'
Reciprocity	<i>eeweentiyankwi</i> 'we are all related'
Obligations to Family	<i>eeweentiyankwi</i> 'we are all related'
Respect	<i>aahkohkeelintiiyankwi</i> 'we care for each other'
Hospitality	<i>peekinaakosiyankwi</i> 'we act in a generous manner'
Humor	<i>paapilweeyankwi</i> 'we joke'

In particular, the theme of being one's true self was found in the responses of several participants. This difference likely parallels the development of the community at this point in time. The larger assessment and educational efforts within the community have been driven by the promotion of identity formation within tribal members. When an individual is primed to think about their identity in an explicit manner, it is likely that they will attempt to portray a sense of authenticity in the various spaces they find themselves in. Storytelling is one such space in which people are seeking information to inform what authenticity might mean for that person. This lends to the theme of "be one's true self" emerging within the ways some individuals in the *myaamia* community conceptualizes values within storytelling.

Another finding relating to question three (how the content and process in storytelling influence living well) is that the content and process *both* seem to be important for individuals' paths toward living well. Interestingly, asking individuals about the content of *wihsakacaakwa* stories brought about information regarding how the character teaches

individuals. Generally, the first method that this character uses to teach is through modeling. Individuals in the study brought up that he teaches how to be a good person through some of his behaviors and the lessons he teaches. The messages of “how to be a good person” are interconnected with the themes that emerged in the values question. Because of the content of these stories and the actions of *wiihsakacaakwa*, people know that reciprocity and caring for others is a large part of how to be a good person. The second method that *wiihsakacaakwa* utilizes to teach is through teaching what *not* to do. It is a type of vicarious learning (Bandura, 1977), wherein individuals identified the consequences or negativity that arose out of *wiihsakacaakwa*'s poor behavior and applied that to how they are not supposed to behave. For an example of both methods, individuals heard a story in which the character goes to visit with friends/family, eats their food, then invites them to his house. The content of this portion of the story indicates that in order to be a “good person,” one should demonstrate reciprocity and hospitality when others are generous to them. Then, when those friends come to his home, he is unable to provide for them in the same ways they provided for him and he fails to be a “good person.” This teaches individuals vicariously not to be arrogant because this character thought that he was able to do all the same things those friends/family members did. Rather, it is important to provide for guests how one is physically able to. Both of these methods of teaching are extracted from this one story and many of the participants picked up on this dichotomy of what to do versus what not to do.

While content is important for living well, participants also seemed to indicate that the process of storytelling is what elevates the experience for people. This heightened experience enables individuals to be able to more readily apply the messages to their everyday life live out the values they are learning about. In particular, the process of

storytelling builds community, teaches cultural norms, and is a particular type of performance that gives added meaning. The first two of these *can* be done by reading about stories, but the act of engaging in and with the stories as a community takes this experience to a different level that cannot be replicated through reading.

Both the content and process of storytelling relate to Senehi's (2001) suggestions that storytelling provides nine powerful benefits including passing on knowledge, forming identity, learning socializing skills, increasing emotional intelligence, promoting morality, understanding time, locating and navigating geographic space, improving cognitive capabilities, and promoting resilience. Each of these benefits of storytelling was discussed by at least one participant in the current study, but three stand out as being particularly supported by the larger set of results. First, the formation of identity is promoted through the process of storytelling. The general process of passing along the narratives from generation to generation helps in the process of developing one's cultural identity (Fivush & Merrill, 2016). Additionally, stories are something that individuals feel as though they can return to when they want to re-connect with their *myaamia* heritage. Whereas you have to be in a community setting to be able to play a lacrosse game or engage in stomp dance, individuals identified that they can return to stories on their own if they would like. Participants indicated that this is *better* to tell and hear stories in a community setting, but that it is something that they can connect to when they want feel connected to their *myaamia* identity. Lastly, similar to the argument by Carsten (2006) regarding Silko's book "Storyteller," individuals can see/listen to the stories being told in person and process the information in a way that incorporates their lived experiences into their understanding of the message. This process solidifies who an individual is and fosters the process of identity development.

Second, the process of storytelling aids in individuals' learning of socializing skills, particularly identifying how to interact in a proper way with one's environment (Miller, Wiley, Fung, & Liang, 1997; Senehi, 2002). Participants of the current study identified that these narratives help them to understand the importance of relationships generally, family relationships more specifically, a sense of reciprocity within relationships, respect for others, and utilization of humor when interacting with others. These are the very ways in which *myaamiaki* are intended to interact because of the social norms that exist within the community. As such, these stories are teaching *myaamia* people this process in both an explicit and implied way. Even if individuals have not been in a particular situation before, they are able to generalize a social interaction based on these norms set by the process of storytelling (Saddam & Yahya, 2015).

Third, regarding the recollection of information, many participants discussed the concept of "breathing life into the stories" and how this performance helps them to truly understand and remember the information better. This aligns with Mar's (2004) argument that performance of narratives benefit one's cognition and comprehension within the individual. More specifically, Kintsch's Construction-Integration model helps us to understand how the process of storytelling and an individual attempting to understand a particular story activates other stored knowledge within our memory. A few participants discussed how the narratives are "cool" for them because they remind them of the ways parents and grandparents have taught them how to be. This reactivation of that information calls it into the working memory, is consolidated with the existing knowledge, and encoded as a stronger memory within that person's mind. Therefore, on the individual level, the process of storytelling helps individuals to remember life lessons better. Furthermore, on the

community level, Brockmeier (2002) suggests that narratives play an integral role in cultural memory because they combine cognitive functions, social implications, and emotional reactions simultaneously. The context that is provided within the stories helps the community as a whole to form cultural memories and bond together as a people.

It is also important to note that the content and the process of storytelling seem to have a reciprocal relationship. The process helps individuals to better understand the content through enacting the values in the community setting. For example, the content of the stories helps individuals to know that caring for and respecting others is an important part of being a good person. In turn, when *myaamiaki* come together as a people to tell stories at the Winter gathering, they are able to live out that value and care for and show respect for other individuals. Then, in return, the content tells them how to engage in the process. They continue to hear stories and broaden their understanding of what it means to care for and respect others. This reciprocal relationship helps explain why individuals also report feeling generally more knowledgeable and connected with the community when they go to events like Winter Gathering.

The last major finding relates to the developmental aspects of storytelling. More specifically, it seems as though individuals' understanding of the stories develops over time and with much repetition. Throughout the course of one individual's life, they are experiencing connections with other tribal members, other communities, and family to broaden their perspective on the world. When the individual comes back to the storytelling process year after year having had these experiences in between each Winter, they are able to incorporate their understanding of the world in that given moment with the messages they glean from the stories. This aligns well with Neal and Neal's (2013) networked model

adapted from Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory. The various systems that an individual might find themselves in (family groups, school groups, etc.) all influence one another and are based on their interconnections over time. Many participants discussed that "big life events" like having a child or starting college influenced their understanding of *wiihsakacaakwa* stories. The information obtained from this big life event combines with the individual's extant knowledge-base to inform the ways in which they are able to interpret the stories. This happens over time, enabling individuals to shift and strengthen their understandings of the stories as they grow older. Interestingly, the only theme that individuals mention throughout the course of their entire lifetime (as opposed to recognizing the themes that came later in life), is humor. Individuals mentioned that this is something that existed for them as a theme they understood as children and that they still understand this as an important part of *wiihsakacaakwa* stories and *myaamia* culture, more broadly.

In addition to the main findings of the current study, there are a few additional outcomes worth mentioning. First, it became clear throughout the interviews that this is a community-based people. Each of the results is either directly related to the community (importance of relationships, community building, cultural norms) or the reason the theme emerged is for the betterment of the community (respect, humor, not being arrogant or selfish). Additionally, there was a strong interconnection between all of the themes that were identified in the study. There were two themes that both emerged as important within two different questions. The first was mental health, which came out of the questions regarding what *nahi-meehtoseeniwinki* means for the individuals as well as how the content of the stories helps people to live well. This, in and of itself, provides support for the idea that the content of the stories helps individuals to live well in their daily lives. However, it also

demonstrates that this is a community value that has been passed down through generations in numerous ways. Additionally, reciprocity emerged out of both the question regarding the values individuals understand from the stories and the question regarding how the content of the stories influences their understanding of living well. This is likely due to the fact that individuals are applying the values they understand from the stories to their understandings of living well. On the other hand, it could be a more important or global value that emerges across multiple domains of *myaamia* life. This reciprocity emerges in terms of relationships with other individuals (i.e., family, friends, elders, other tribal groups), but also with the environment or the natural world. It is embedded in everything that *myaamiaki* do and is addressed within particular stories. The concept of reciprocity also was accompanied by a discussion of the problems or consequences that could result if an individual does not respect this sense of reciprocity.

Practical Applications

This research has implications within a few different environments; in particular, it will help to guide experiences within the *myaamia* community, will help to shift the focus within health research within the field of Native American/American Indian studies, and also has implications for counseling with diverse groups. First, within the *myaamia* community, there has been an anecdotal understanding that storytelling aids in individuals' understandings of the world and how to be a proper human. This research confirms that hypothesis and provides additional information regarding the particular values that individuals pick up on within the community. While the results here are not inclusive of all the potential values individuals draw from the stories (nor would we want it to, given the individualization of storytelling), this guides the way storytellers and educators within the

community can tailor their messages they are sending given the goals within the community. In theory, if storytellers wanted to comment on something within the community, the stories could be strung together in such a way to communicate that message. Given the current state of revitalization, the *myaamia* community is not necessarily at a place to be able to carry out such a complex process. However, based on the current results, it seems as though the educational efforts and messages sent *alongside* the storytelling events seem to guide the ways in which individuals understand the stories. Therefore, if storytellers are to pair with the educators (and in many cases they are one in the same), this process of “commenting” on tribal business might work.

Perhaps even more importantly, this work provides helpful information indicating that participation in storytelling events aids in individuals’ understandings of and practice of living well. Promotion of additional storytelling within the larger community, smaller groups within the community, and within families in the community could help individuals to live well. Some individuals mentioned that they don’t even think about storytelling within their homes until they attend the storytelling event in Oklahoma and then feel as though they have limited time to engage in this given it is late in winter. Some individuals expressed that they do not prioritize storytelling within their families the ways in which they would like.

Therefore, additional materials that tell individuals *how* to incorporate storytelling in the home or simple reminders of engaging in storytelling within the community could be created to facilitate storytelling within a family basis. Putting forth a simple Facebook post or a flier within tribal spaces could help to remind people when it is time to tell stories. This could aid in individuals engaging in storytelling earlier in the year and more consistently which would likely lead to an exponential change in the ways individuals understand and practice the

messages of the stories. This would ultimately provide the community with stronger growth around storytelling in general.

Secondly, the results of the current study have major implications for how Native American/American Indian studies as a field can and perhaps should approach wellness research. Because the extant literature on wellness that has a deficit-based model has not seemed to provide much change for tribal communities (Alcántara & Gone, 2007; Borowsky, Resnick, Ireland, & Blum, 1999; Costello, Farmer, Angold, Burns, & Erkanli, 1997; Garrett, Baldrige, Benson, Crowder, & Aldrich, 2015; Halpern, 2007; Herne, Bartholomew, & Weahkee, 2014; Mehl-Madrona, 1999; Shaughnessy, Doshi, & Jones, 2004; Tingey et al., 2017; Wahab & Olson, 2004), it could be time for a major shift in the ways in which researchers approach wellness research. Two major differences exist between the approach to the current study and other wellness studies within the field. First, when approaching the concept of health within tribal communities, it is important to identify and assess using community created definitions of wellness. When researchers apply definitions of wellness that do not align with the ways communities understand what it means to live well, they are potentially assessing concepts that are not valued by that community. Furthermore, it is empowering in and of itself to enable a community to define for themselves the “outcomes” they wish to achieve. Second, the current study shifted from a deficit-based model that focuses on overcoming the problems within a community to a strengths-based model that identifies positive factors within a community that could promote living well. The deficit based model creates stereotypes about communities, which ultimately might lead to pressure to overcome those stereotypes, potentially leading to stereotype threat. Ultimately, this sets the community up for failure. Moreover, when a community is inundated with information

about how they are sub-par, that creates an expectation for individuals within that community to be sub-par rather than creating positive standards for them to live up to. This shift in how research is approached may help communities to identify ways in which they can succeed, ultimately promoting living well in and of itself.

Lastly, the current study has implications for the field of Counseling. Similar to the suggestions for use within the field of American Indian studies, it is important for counselors to understand individuals' understandings of wellness when working with clients. A recent study by Chu, Leino, Pflum, and Sue, (2016) examined the reasons that cultural competency works to produce psychological change. They identified that cultural competence is effective because it assists in matching with the person's reality, creates a match with the worldview of the person, and helps the individual to feel understood and empowered. If counselors are to help individuals on their journey to living well, it is important to align with the ways in which that individual understands what living well means. In this instance, knowing about the balance of mental, physical, and spiritual health will help counselors to focus on more than just the mental health portion in their work. Adjusting to and promoting that person's idea of living well will help that person to feel as though their reality is valued and will help to create an accurate picture of what their journey might look like. Additionally, it might help to match the worldview of the person and meet them where they are at in their understanding of wellness. Lastly, it would likely help the individual to feel understood and valued rather than being told they need to shift their ideas of wellness. That being said, this alignment with the person's understanding of living well is not to be used at the expense of that counselor's knowledge of psychological change, but rather to help counselors to promote cultural competency and lasting change within the people they work with.

Limitations

While the current study has cross-disciplinary implications, there are also a number of limitations or potential ways in which the research could be strengthened. First, the storytelling revitalization process is in the early phases and what individuals within the community know/believe may come from what they have heard at lectures and that this may evolve and change as individuals continue to formulate their own understandings and interpretations of the storytelling process. Similarly, it is also important to acknowledge that these are being understood through an American cultural context. There is not a pure definition of what it means to be strictly “*myaamia*” because the community embraces the diversity of thought/experiences that different tribal members bring to the table. Because we are in diaspora and are not together as a people geographically, the outside influences find their way into the interpretations of the stories. For the *myaamia* people, this is viewed as a strength and they have accepted and even embraced this cultural change. However, this also means that it is difficult to isolate purely *myaamia* values and messages because of these changes within the community. Future research could attempt to control for this by asking about what individuals have *learned* about these topics and follow up with their own *interpretations* of these based on their own life experiences.

Additionally, another potential limitation of the current study is the effect that the when and how the questions were asked. The interviews took place the two days following the storytelling event for convenience of and retention of participants. However, a natural byproduct of this is that people were primed into thinking about the messages from the particular stories told at that event. While there are many additional stories beyond the ones told at this event, people had a tendency to refer only to the stories told that weekend in their

responses to the questions in the interview. Ultimately, this might mean that there were additional values and messages that people might extract from other stories that were left out simply because they were not told that weekend. Additionally, the questions were asked in a particular order in order to get peoples' initial thoughts on what living well means and the values they understand from the stories. However, doing so immediately prior to asking questions about how the two are linked potentially meant that people were primed into thinking of the values in the stories inherently as living well. As such, it is not possible to fully separate this out. Another limitation of the types of questions used in this study was that very little information regarding demographics was collected. This was intentional because the community is so small that any specific information could be used to identify individuals (even when not using names). Future research could attempt to control for these issues by interviewing participants about storytelling year-round instead of at the Winter Gathering events where formal storytelling primarily takes place and getting a broader range of participants. Additionally, given the community-based focus within the tribe, it would be important in the future to add in questions specifically pertaining to how storytelling contributes to a sense of community. This was not originally included because of the focus on *individual* understandings of storytelling and living well, but moving forward would be important to ask.

The sample of participants for the current study was largely made up of a convenience sample. There were a number of individuals who were unknown to the investigator, but a majority were people who had personal relationships with the researcher. The intentions set forth ahead of time were to obtain participants who the researcher didn't necessarily know in order to reduce bias and assumptions based on knowledge of that person.

However, there were issues with recruitment of participants that meant recruitment only occurred the weekend of the Winter Gathering. Even though I did make announcements and seek to obtain participants from all tribal members, those that ultimately agreed were by and large those that had personal relationships with the investigator. This is not necessarily an issue, but potentially means that either individuals did not disclose certain information because they assumed that I had knowledge about them and their life or that I was unable to separate out my knowledge of those individuals from their responses. Future research could involve additional interviews with an attempt at broadening the social network that is reached in the recruitment process. Additionally, it would be helpful to broaden the characteristics of the sample, identifying generations, experience with storytelling events, and role within the tribe. Because of the convenience sample in the current study, the group was much more homogenous than originally intended.

Future Research

Additional research conducted on the impact of tribal storytelling on living well could add many different components to strengthen the findings. First, based on the current research future researchers could development quantitative measures of living well that could help the community to gain instant data on how various types of educational/cultural initiatives impact the community. This will give important feedback to leaders within the community of what to add to programming and what to remove. These measures could incorporate specific aspects of physical health/mental health/cultural-specific information in order to detect the sense of “balance” that many of the participants discussed. This could ease the ability to assess this construct and enhance the research objectives within the *myaamia* community.

Additionally, future researchers could assess other facets of tribal knowledge and how they are related to living well within the *myaamia* community. For example, how do tribal games, knowledge of ecology, food sovereignty, governmental practices, educational efforts, artwork, and other practices within the community uniquely contribute to wellness within the community? These are practices that tribal members may engage in, and this additional information could help to obtain funding for the community to promote wellness as a whole. Additionally, information regarding these different facets could help us to tailor experiences based on individuals who might need help within the community. To bolster these claims, it might also be important to extend the research to take place over a longer period of time. Longitudinal research could help tribal leaders and researchers to understand the evolution of how the revitalization process impacts wellness, how individuals' understandings might change over time, and would help to establish trends in the promotion of wellness within the community.

Another direction for future study would be to incorporate more developmental information within the interview. In particular, this study was limited in its' ability to assess people's development over time because of the time limitations. However, gaining additional information about the various contexts in which individuals are embedded in would add complexity to the understanding of which pieces of information come from tribal educational efforts and which come from other environments they might be in (churches, political organizations, etc.). This would aid in piecing out the specific "*myaamia*" contributions to people's understandings of living well.

Conclusion

In conclusion, storytelling within the *myaamia* community plays important roles in the ways in which individuals understand and practice living well. *Myaamiaki* have a cultural practice that could be considered a healing practice within the community. Primarily, the mechanism that helps individuals to live well is the act of getting together for storytelling events. The internalization of the messages within the stories also helps individuals to live well. As such, the community should continue to assess the evolving impact the cultural practice of storytelling has on wellness over the coming years. Over time, the threads of the stories may be woven together to repair and strengthen the tapestry that is storytelling.

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APPENDIX A

STUDY NEWSPAPER ADVERTISEMENT

Opportunity to Participate in Research Study

aya ceeki, Haley weenswiaani neehi niila myaamia. Hello everyone, my name is Haley and I am myaamia. First of all, neewe for taking the time out of your busy life to read this small advertisement. I am currently a 5th year PhD student at Iowa State University and for my dissertation, I am hoping to conduct interviews within the myaamia community at the 2018 Winter Gathering. The intent of these interviews is to gain information on the relationship between myaamia stories, particularly *Wiihsakacaakwa* stories, and living well for myaamiaki. In the process of determining how our community engages in behaviors that contribute to living well, it is helpful to first look at the potential community-specific contributions and factors influencing this relationship.

If you agree to participate, I will ask you a series of questions. These questions will be about you, your experiences with storytelling, general understandings of stories, and how those stories impact your life. The study will take *up to* one hour and a half to complete. If you decide to participate in this study, there may be no direct benefit to you. It is expected that the information gained in this study will benefit the scientific research community as well as the myaamia community by identifying the messages and values that individuals take from stories and implement in their everyday lives. Understanding these effects can help develop more effective interventions to promote living well within the myaamia community. You will be compensated for participating with a small token of appreciation.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or leave the study at any time. If you decide to not participate in the study or leave the study early, it will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

The information received during the interviews will remain confidential. Only the researchers responsible for this experiment and the professional transcriber will have access to your responses. As a result, there will be no way for anyone outside the research team to connect your responses to you. The data will be stored on a password protected office computer, which is behind a locked door. If the results are published, they will be presented in summary form so that all responses will remain anonymous.

If you are interested in participating or for further information about the study, you may contact me at strassha@iastate.edu, 260-519-5042. neewe for your time, I hope to hear you soon. If not, I will see you in January!

nipwaahkaalo,
Haley Strass

APPENDIX B

STUDY FACEBOOK ADVERTISEMENT

aya ceeki, Haley weenswiaani neehi niila myaamia. Hello everyone, my name is Haley and I am a myaamia citizen. I am a doctoral student at Iowa State University studying Psychology. I have communicated with Secretary-Treasurer Donya Williams and Cultural Resources Officer Julie Olds regarding permission to communicate with our Tribal community through this Facebook post, for a special project for my doctoral dissertation. I am seeking to conduct interviews within the myaamia community at the 2018 Winter Gathering. The intent of these interviews is to gain information on the relationships between myaamia stories, particularly *Wiihsakacaakwa* stories, and living well for myaamiaki. In the process of determining how our community engages in behaviors that contribute to living well, it is helpful to first look at the potential community-specific contributions and factors influencing this relationship.

If you are interested in participating in this study, feel free to contact me at strassha@iastate.edu or 260-519-5042 for more information. To be clear, this is not a Tribal project but rather a personal/individual project by a myaamia person to study and understand a topic from a Myaamia perspective. Your participation, and if you so choose to engage, will be directly with me as an individual and not the Miami Tribe. Our communication will not be through the Tribe's Facebook page. This post was approved by the tribe in support of my work, not to include the Tribe in any fashion to the project or engagement of individual community members to it.

neewe for your time, I hope to hear you soon. If not, I will see you in January!

nipwaahkaalo,
Haley Strass

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Protocol

Myaamia Storytelling and Living Well
Iowa State University
Haley Strass
Dissertation

1. Introduction

Aya (name), tipeewi neeyolani, Haley weenswiaani neehi miišineewe weeciilamiyani . Hello (name), it is good to see you, my name is Haley and thank you for your help with my research. I am a doctoral student at Iowa State University studying Counseling Psychology. However, I am very interested in our community's understanding of and promotion of wellness. That is why it is important for me to be here with you all at important events like this one.

As mentioned before, during this interview, you will be asked several questions about both storytelling and living well, particularly regarding your understanding of and relationship with both. I am interested in your experiences, stories, successes, problems, and anything you are willing to share with me regarding both of these topics. The questions will be regarding any point in your life, but I may ask you to think about particular times in your life for some of them.

There are no right or wrong answers, so please be as honest and open as possible in helping me to understand your experiences. Remember this information is confidential and any written findings will not identify you in any way.

Do you have any questions?

2. Consent Form

Okay, I do need you to sign this consent form before we are able to start (hand it to them). Take a few minutes to look through this and then sign and date the form. At that point, we can start the interview portion.

3. Inclusion Criteria

Okay I have a few brief questions before we get to the main portion of the interview.

1. Did you attend the storytelling event on Friday night?
2. Have you either:

- a. attended at least one storytelling event before this year?
- b. engaged with myaamia storytelling informally at any point in your life?

IF YES FOR BOTH QUESTIONS, continue to the interview. If no, follow up to determine if they still fit the inclusion criteria.

4. Interview

Background Information

1. Describe to me your identity (whatever that means to you).
 - a. How salient is your myaamia identity to you?
 - b. How salient is a myaamia identity to your family?
 - c. Describe your relationship with the tribe (roles, family, position(s), participation, connection, etc.)
2. Can you walk me through your experience, throughout your lifetime, with myaamia storytelling?
 - a. How frequently do you attend storytelling events?
 - b. Where do you attend these events?
 - c. Who comes with you to these events?
 - d. How frequently do you read or tell stories informally (at home, with friends, with family, etc.)?
 - e. Where do you engage in informal storytelling?
 - f. With whom do you engage in informal storytelling with?

Rapport Building

3. What was your experience like at this year's storytelling event?
4. Tell me about your favorite or most powerful/memorable story.
 - a. What makes this your favorite/powerful/memorable?

Research Questions

5. Health, through the myaamia knowledge system, is referred to as “living well” or *nahi-mehtohseeniwinki*. What does living well mean for you?
6. How do you understand the character *Wiihsakacaakwa*?
 - a. What themes or meaning do you draw from these stories?
 - b. What values do you identify in these stories?
7. Describe any relationships you have noticed between *Wiihsakacaakwa* stories and your understanding of living well?
 - a. Is there any particular story or content from *Wiihsakacaakwa* stories that help you to live well?
 - b. I am also trying to distinguish between the content of stories and the process of storytelling. What I mean by that is that sometimes the ways we engage with others or with information we receive influences our understanding of the world. How does the process of storytelling (at the events) influence your understanding of living well?
8. Do you use myaamia stories in your everyday life to engage in living well?
 - a. In what ways do you use these stories in your life?
 - b. Anything else? (follow up to get as many examples as possible)
9. Do you use the meaning of the stories in your everyday life to engage in living well?
10. Describe any changes you have noticed regarding your understanding of *Wiihsakacaakwa* stories throughout your life?
 - a. In particular, think back on your life as a child – how did you understand *Wiihsakacaakwa*?
 - b. Think back on your life as a young adult – how did you understand *Wiihsakacaakwa*?
 - c. (If applicable or different) How has it changed now with more life experience?
11. What life events prompt you to think about *Wiihsakacaakwa* messages? These can be general life events or specific stories.

12. Is there anything else related to storytelling and/or living well that seems important for you to tell me about?

5. Debriefing

Miiši-neewe (thank you very much) for all of your help and the thoughtful responses you have provided for me today. Would you like to keep a copy of the consent form for your own information on the study (offer consent form)?

Also, I will contact you to review your responses once they have been transcribed for the purposes of accuracy. Feel free to contact me if you have any questions or concerns in the meantime.

APPENDIX D

INFORMED CONSENT

Informed Consent Form

Myaamia Storytelling and Living Well
Iowa State University
Haley Strass

INTRODUCTION

This study seeks to gain information on the relationship between myaamia stories, particularly *Wiihsakacaakwa* stories and living well for myaamiaki. In the process of determining how our community engages in behaviors that contribute to living well, it is helpful to first look at the potential community-specific contributions and factors influencing this relationship.

DESCRIPTION OF PROCEDURES

If you agree to participate, you will be asked a series of questions. The study will take *up to* one hour and a half to complete.

RISKS

Though the risk of responding to the questions during this interview are minimal, it is possible that you may experience some mild discomfort simply by sharing personal life experiences related to living well. You are free to skip any question that you do not wish to answer or that makes you feel uncomfortable. Consequently, if you experience distress during your participation, you can discontinue participation at any time.

BENEFITS AND COMPENSATION

If you decide to participate in this study, there may be no direct benefit to you. It is expected that the information gained in this study will benefit the scientific research community as well as the myaamia community by identifying the messages and values that individuals take from stories and implement in their everyday lives. Understanding these effects can help develop more effective interventions to promote living well within the myaamia community. You will be compensated for participating with a small token of appreciation. This includes a small bag with tobacco and fruit.

PARTICIPANT RIGHTS

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or leave the study at any time. If you decide to not participate in the study or leave the study early, it will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The following procedures are in place to help maintain confidentiality. Only the researchers of this experiment will have access to your responses. As a result, there will be no way for anyone outside the research team to connect your responses to you. The data will be stored on a password protected office computer, which is behind a locked door. If the results are

published, they will be presented in summary form so that all responses will remain anonymous.

Records identifying participants will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by applicable laws and regulations and will not be made publicly available. However, federal government regulatory agencies, auditing departments of Iowa State University, and the Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves human subject research studies) may inspect and/or copy your records for quality assurance and data analysis. These records may contain private information.

QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS

For further information about the study contact the principal investigator, Haley Strass, at strassha@iastate.edu, 515-294-8759 or Dr. David Vogel, at dvogel@iastate.edu, 515-294-1582. If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury, please contact the IRB Administrator, 515-294-4566, IRB@iastate.edu, or Director, 515-294-3115, Office for Responsible Research, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa 50011.

By signing below you indicate that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study, and that you have read the information about the study.

Signature _____ Date _____

Printed Name _____

APPENDIX E

IRB MEMO

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
 OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

 Institutional Review Board
 Office for Responsible Research
 Vice President for Research
 2420 Lincoln Way, Suite 202
 Ames, Iowa 50014
 515 294-4566

Date: 1/16/2018

To: Haley Strass
 3801 Lincoln Way, Unit 302
 Ames, IA 50014

CC: Dr. David Vogel
 W112 Lagomarcino Hall

From: Office for Responsible Research

Title: Myaamia Storytelling and Living Well: An Ethnographic Examination

IRB ID: 17-528

Approval Date: 1/16/2018

Date for Continuing Review: 12/13/2019

Submission Type: Modification

Review Type: Expedited

The project referenced above has received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Iowa State University according to the dates shown above. Please refer to the IRB ID number shown above in all correspondence regarding this study.

To ensure compliance with federal regulations (45 CFR 46 & 21 CFR 56), please be sure to:

- **Use only the approved study materials** in your research, including the recruitment materials and informed consent documents that have the IRB approval stamp.
- **Retain signed informed consent documents for 3 years after the close of the study**, when documented consent is required.
- **Obtain IRB approval prior to implementing any changes** to the study by submitting a Modification Form for Non-Exempt Research or Amendment for Personnel Changes form, as necessary.
- **Immediately inform the IRB of (1) all serious and/or unexpected adverse experiences** involving risks to subjects or others; and (2) **any other unanticipated problems involving risks** to subjects or others.
- **Stop all research activity if IRB approval lapses**, unless continuation is necessary to prevent harm to research participants. Research activity can resume once IRB approval is reestablished.
- **Complete a new continuing review form** at least three to four weeks prior to the **date for continuing review** as noted above to provide sufficient time for the IRB to review and approve continuation of the study. We will send a courtesy reminder as this date approaches.

Please be aware that IRB approval means that you have met the requirements of federal regulations and ISU policies governing human subjects research. **Approval from other entities may also be needed.** For example, access to data from private records (e.g. student, medical, or employment records, etc.) that are protected by FERPA, HIPAA, or other confidentiality policies requires permission from the holders of those records. Similarly, for research conducted in institutions other than ISU (e.g., schools, other colleges or universities, medical facilities, companies, etc.), investigators must obtain permission from the institution(s) as required by their policies. **IRB approval in no way implies or guarantees that permission from these other entities will be granted.**

Upon completion of the project, please submit a Project Closure Form to the Office for Responsible Research, 202 Kingland, to officially close the project.

Please don't hesitate to contact us if you have questions or concerns at 515-294-4566 or IRB@iastate.edu.