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Taking Humor Seriously: Talking about Drinking in Native American Focus Groups

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Abstract

Focus groups provide a source of data that highlight community ideas on a topic of interest. How interview data will be utilized varies by project. With this in mind, we identify ways that focus group data from a particular population (Native American) articulate a health issue of individual tribal concern (alcohol consumption). Taking our analytic framework from linguistics, one of the four fields of inquiry in anthropology, we examine format ties and the performance of humor as stylistic features of tribal focus groups and illustrate how linguistic devices can be used in analyzing aspects of adolescent and adult drinking. Focus group data require systematic review and analysis to identify useful findings that can lead to inquiry points to initiate collaborative work with local experts before the data can be developed and configured into effective program initiatives.

Keywords

adults and adolescents; drinking; humor; linguistic analysis; Native Americans

Focus groups have become increasingly popular for collecting research data. Quick but not always easy to convene, they usually require little space. Opposed to individual interviews, they eliminate multiple sites and reduce contact time with interviewees. On the down side, they often occur without a consistent quorum. The main features of focus groups include a convened gathering, absence of consensus, sampling by criteria, and homogeneity in each session (Coreil 1995).[1] Because they comprise speech from multiple speakers, focus group data can be analyzed using methods from anthropological linguistics. Health is a social concern grounded in language through which individual and group needs are assessed and

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[1]When focus groups were first described in methods guidelines, Jeannine Coreil (1995:206–208) observed that such interviews were not an accustomed way that anthropologists collected data. Even when used, ethnographers could not agree on utility. Title to the article paraphrases that of an extended book review by William K. Powers (1994) in *American Anthropologist*.

expressed and help can be solicited, articulated, negotiated, and put into action. Understanding how language is used socially in a focus group can broaden an analysis of health issues.

Focus group interviews range from open-ended to semi-structured. Although their conduct in practical terms may vary, in theory participants should share similar characteristics ["homogeneity"] but not know each other (Morgan 1996), which is difficult for a community with very few persons (Teufel-Shone and Williams 2010). As sources of material with benefits to be returned to the community, transcripts from a focus group reflect social interaction among the gathered individuals (Lapadat and Lindsay 1999; Moen, Antonov, Nilsson, and Ring 2010). Effective facilitation adds to data reliability and validity (Myers 1998; Sim 1998), especially if a moderator is "from" the population but not known locally (Teufel-Shone and Williams).

Noncritical acceptance can result in over-reliance on focus group data without recognizing limitations. We propose that interviewee speech practices can clarify meaning in transcripts. This moves analysis beyond the content into the social and cultural attributes of the data, deepening an investigation of health issues. Findings from focus group analysis may facilitate later work with local experts to create interventions, formulate education messages, and/or develop prevention policies.

Much has been written on drinking in Native American and Alaska Native communities. Most of it reports higher rates of drinking and alcohol dependency among native peoples than other groups (e.g., Beals et al. 2005; Novins, Beals, and Mitchell 2001); men more than women and youth more than adults have higher rates (Whitesell et al. 2007). More than two-thirds of the tribes in the United States prohibit the purchase, consumption, and sale of alcohol on reservations, which increases alcohol acquisition from bootleggers (Henderson 2000), motor vehicle accidents on rural roads (Spillane and Smith 2007) and disruptions to the social-economic-political fabric of reservation life (Duran et al. 2005; Koss et al. 2003). Long recognized as effective for intervening with alcohol dependency, treatments grounded in local concepts and self-reflection supported by a native way of life are gaining greater acceptance (Duran and Ivey 2006; Duran, Wallerstein, and Miller 2008; Gone 2009, 2010; Gone and Alcántara 2007; Prussing 2008). As esteemed theorist Bea Medicine (2007:81–82) wrote, "Sobriety as achievement seems based on an enhanced awareness of self and society and certain introspective processes … that require self-determined action and a very conscious plan [that emphasizes] self-autonomy."

Single sites or tribes, and occasionally two-tribe comparisons (e.g., Whitesell et al. 2009), are typical in research on Native Americans and Alaska Natives. Few studies consider sampling multiple nations among the more than 560 federally recognized tribes (compare Koss et al. 2003), and few utilize qualitative methods to explore drinking. Qualitative analyses include fieldwork by Paul Spicer (1996, 2001) on drinking in life histories from a Midwestern city; case histories from extended research in the northern Plains by Theresa O'Nell (1999; O'Nell and Mitchell 1996) and multimethod work by Gilbert Quintero (2001, 2002) on alcohol consumption on a southwestern Indian reservation. One way to broaden multisited inquiry is to use focus groups complemented by ethnography. In this article, we

use multisited focus group data to explore adult and adolescent drinking among Native Americans on five reservations in the continental United States. The linguistic devices of format ties and the use of humor guide our analysis.

Similar to theorists who write on Indian humor (e.g., Alexie 2005; Basso 1996; Lincoln 1993; Trechter 2001), we found that common forms of humor were parody [subtle imitation], hyperbole [playful exaggeration] and word play [rhyming and puns]. Humor can build rapport (Norrick 1993, 2003), alter group norms (Dziegielewski et al. 2003), and facilitate the production of salutary conarratives (Basso; Norrick 2004). In the focus groups analyzed in this study, humor occurred in talk on concerns such as identity, male-female relations, traditional food-ways, and local dances. Lincoln (p. 5) called use of humor "culture-in-action," which requires knowledge of Native American and Alaska Native lifestyles and activities. In our analysis, humor permitted and embodied a discussion of sensitive topics, which otherwise might be considered improper or inappropriate. Glenn (2003) called this type of humor "shared laughter" when it occurs in multiperson conversation to sanction talk on matters otherwise off-limits, except among close friends and/or family.

We draw on paired concepts from figured world research. Constructing a figured world assumes a set of "actors" and "spectators" who follow modified social rules (Holland et al. 1998). Adapting this conceptual framework, we consider focus groups to be comprised of persons who were spectators [witnesses] of community and family drinking and/or possible actors [drinkers] who were once engaged in the behavior. Some persons seek to make this drinking world theirs, and those who observe that world are affected by it. Although focus group data were not meant to document figured worlds on reservations, the combined views of actors and spectators strengthen interview data. What actors and spectators say about local drinking through an open exchange of ideas in a convened setting provides a more complete view of ideas on alcohol consumption than a singular inquiry with those who drink, or those in treatment, or those in recovery.

First, we consider drinking through reflections of actors and actor's witnesses, in creating a view of the world where they live to better fit lived experience than the rules of society. We recognize that the backdrop for our analysis is drinking as a reactive response to centuries of "historic trauma" amplified by learned responses (Medicine 2007), exacerbated by local socioeconomic challenges (Gone 2009) that face American Indian and Alaska Native communities. Drinking set into motion by historic events (Medicine 2007) builds on local "feelings of powerlessness" (p. 45), "dismal socioeconomic conditions" (p. 59), and the "boredom and tedium of reservation life" (p. 70); it can become "a symbolic act and deviant gesture" (p. 54). If drinking is a reaction, then humor is a proactive response to historic trauma, generated, as it were, by a shared world of concerned individuals. Among these individuals, we would expect to find spectators and actors, making it through the daily challenge of a loved one who drinks or loved one who is unsure how to deal with an alcohol-consuming family member. Second, we pull together findings from focus groups to suggest how they might become inquiry points that could initiate a mutual dialogue with a local expert through a collaborative process of developing and configuring education messages, effective interventions, and/or policy messages. Third, we seek to make the

linguistic analysis intelligible to those who are unaccustomed to qualitative analysis. To this end, we define technical terms in [brackets].

Each co-author has experience in qualitative/quantitative methods and has worked with Native American and Alaska Native communities. Field teams that coordinated qualitative data collection, including focus group moderators, were from the population, but not from any of the sampled tribes. Three co-authors, including one of the two moderators, were with the project since its inception, and three were added for data analysis and/or application of findings. We thus transfer our varied expertise from complementary experiences to a collaborative analysis.

METHODS

Focus groups were held as part of a multimethod investigation of alcohol use among native tribes across the continental United States. An effort was made to select one of the larger tribes from major Indian Health Services regions to collaborate in the larger study. For the quantitative analyses, data from a sample of 1660 men and women were collected by structured interviews on risk behaviors. A description of the larger study appears in Koss and colleagues (2003), and findings from quantitative and qualitative analyses appear in Yuan and colleagues (2006) and in Yuan and colleagues (2010), respectively. Tribes sampled in the northwest and northern Plains had locales near respective reservations that sold alcohol, whereas alcohol was sold some distance from the southwest reservations.

Focus groups were held with six tribes, but recording difficulties at one site resulted in no data. Consequently, we draw on discussions with 45 participants from five tribes in the southwest, northwest, and northern Plains.[2] Three of the five reservations were designated “dry” and two were designated “wet.” All participants had served their tribe in various capacities and had lived for some time on the reservation, thus ensuring increased social-cultural homogeneity (Hollander 2004). Past and present experiences with the tribe included tribal council service, administrator and/or professional (school, clinic, housing authority, employment services, among others), skilled labor, and “traditionalist” and “elder.” Two groups had a youth representative. Participants arrived ready to contribute, asked how they might be of service, and shared concerns for data utilization. Overall, they created an atmosphere of common intent.[3] Although English was the research language, participants sometimes relied on Native language to clarify basic tribal concepts.

[2]Invitees could reject or accept the written invitation to participate in a focus group. Nearly everyone accepted. The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the tribes and research team required a review of each manuscript before submission to a professional journal. For this article, one tribe provided extensive comments, including a request to make analytic techniques clear to readers and study findings relevant to individuals of different backgrounds. The MOU stated that the identities of each participating tribe would be protected in all publications and presentations. For an outline of strategies on preparation and implementation of focus groups among Native Americans, see Daley and colleagues (2010) who describe three projects across two states, where 72 focus groups were conducted among “the local American Indian community.”

[3]Each sampled tribe experienced some or most of the recent challenges faced by Native American and Alaska Native communities, such as removal of federal recognition, re-location, and sending children to boarding schools off-reservation. Some reservations were single-tribe entities; some were confederated by consolidation of surviving tribes over the past centuries. Size ranged from several thousand to million-plus acres. Terrain varied from forested and wooded to canyons and deserts. Tribal designations in the text correspond to five of the seven tribes of prior publications.

Interviews generally took place over three to four days. Tapes were transcribed by two project staff at the university coordinating the study. Mean number of pages per transcript was 135 (range 81–168), and, at 42,000 to 52,000 words, were much longer than most focus groups. Mean number of speaking turns ("paragraphs") was around 2350 (range 980–3330). Altogether, 472 "laughter" responses were identified.

Transcripts were first checked for accuracy with the audio tapes by a coder (medical anthropology doctoral candidate) and were spot checked by the coordinator of the analysis project (clinical psychologist). Codes [categories that cluster "themes"] were created through a multistep process by the coder and the project coordinator, working in consultation with a medical anthropologist. Themes were developed by data segmentation [chunking] and were cross-checked by coordinator and coder, who separately coded a trial transcript and compared matches, overlaps, and dissimilarities until agreement was reached. For a description of qualitative methods for the focus groups, see Yuan and colleagues (2010), and for a description of coding qualitative data, see Hruschka and colleagues (2004) and Ryan and Bernard (2003). Atlas.ti 5.0 was used to manage and analyze data. The central code was ALC (alcohol) with five secondary codes: ALC-age (age), ALC-bin (binges), ALC-consq (consequences), ALC-contx (consumption in context), and ALC-vet (veterans). Additional codes included community, culture, kinship, traditions, and violence.

For this present analysis, each transcript was read several times (Lapadat and Lindsay 1999) to identify common linguistic devices, which led to an examination of the format ties [connections], turn-taking [speaker transitions], discussion segments [theme start-stop], and use of humor in discussing aspects of drinking. Additional insights came from conversations with the moderator (fourth author) who described her overall impressions of focus group interactions, especially the contexts in which humor occurred as a means of what she called "participant bonding." A return back-to-transcripts beyond the codes, and discussion with the moderator, moved the analysis into linguistic processes that grounded the social interaction of focus group talk.[4]

In this analysis, repetition of strategic words/phrases (Norrick 2000:57–65) and initial phrases/words (Berman 1998:91–96) served as linguistic format ties to connect the participants, focus attention on discussion topics, ratify [confirm] common concerns, and reinforce a sense of belonging to the shared task of generating useful health-related data.

DRINKING ON THE RESERVATION

Because ideas on alcohol evolve in North American society (Bennett and Ames 1985; Levine 1978) and on reservations (Quintero 2002), drinking practices are re-made over time (Kunitz 2006). Those common for the present generation might not have been known by a past generation, and, conversely, those of bygone times might no longer be found. Extreme drinking outside social-cultural constraints might not support health or social harmony. The distortion of social reality through drinking can be self-protective, nonetheless, particularly when individuals and groups face difficulties, such as historic trauma. A closed system set

[4]"Back-to-transcripts" parallels back-translation of a passage into the original language.

apart from the rest of a community can buffer outsider oppression (Sonnenstuhl 1996). Social-cultural meaning can be replaced and reinforced, after historical catastrophe, even if the hook to its membership brings individually adverse health and social consequences: “Alcohol is probably the oldest medication for the treatment of post-traumatic stress” (Van der Kolk 1996:191) and thus becomes one way to cope with everyday circumstances, called “making it through” by one respondent (Nation-5).

Views of alcohol consumption from the focus groups expanded and modified attributes of the outsider image of the “drunken Indian.” The term “drunk” was preferred: “drunkenness” and “drunken” were avoided. Similarly, in Spicer’s (2001) study, “alcoholic” as another outsider term was rarely used by respondents. Participants viewed drinking as a passable trajectory through the idea of travel along a “drinking road” (Nation-5). Drinking “to feel good” (Nation-1; Nation-4; Nation-6) implies moderate drinking, some place at the onset, before one reaches a state of drunkenness, although no one specified the amount required. Drinking to “pass out” (Nation-1; Nation-6), “fall down” (Nation-6), “lay flat out on the floor” (Nation-5), or go “full blown” (Nation-3) and “can’t get up” (Nation-4) moves alcohol consumption past “drunk.” The term “drunken” was used once by Nation-6 and three times by Nation-5 to talk specifically about the drunken Indian concept. One man explained, “They’ve tried to take us and re-shape us, into the image of the ‘drunken Indian,’ from who we really are, living to a cycle of seasons” (Nation-5).

To present the data, we number speaking turns from the beginning of each transcript. Key linguistic devices include repeated phrase, repeated word, semantic match, and semantic extension. A repeated word or repeated phrase is a format tie, whereas the latter two refer to molding ideas within a conversation thread. Words match semantically when they share meaning. They extend meaning when elaborated and taken a step further. Format ties are abbreviated “FT.” Lower-case letters (a, b, c, etc.) identify threads to which each utterance [one turn of talk] is linked. Speakers are identified as female (F) and male (M), or moderator (C). Double parentheses show speech behavior ((couplet)) and sounds ((laughter)). Brackets in the transcripts interpret key actions [Group-ratified]. To ensure confidentiality, personal identifiers and places were replaced with fictive names.

Participants took turns speaking. Utterances on a single topic comprised a discussion segment and several segments comprised an entire interview. Turn-taking depended on each participant becoming familiar with previous utterances and the speaking styles of those present. Otherwise, participants could refer directly or indirectly to what had been said. Dialogue was supported by linguistic devices to encourage idea sharing that would expand conversation with additional data. Irrespective of whether a reservation was “wet” or “dry,” the common linguistic devices appeared across all focus groups. Communal attitudes reflected local practices of “relationship harmony” (Kwan, Bond, and Singelis 1997:1039), where balance is sought in two-person and group speech (Basso 1996; Hagey 1989; Philips 1983).

In the first excerpt, participants tackle head-on images of alcohol associated with Native American and Alaska Native communities. Their mocking tone deflects criticism back to the outside society from which these images originated. Noteworthy is parody of an end-result

to drinking. The focus is how mainstream society centers drinking problems inside the individual (Levine 1978; Quintero 2001) and thus denies a community opportunity to generate their own solutions. Sensing a mocking tone, the moderator softens comments to a less severe but still serious portrayal of the harm to health derived from distorted drinking ("drink to get drunk").

137) C: Yeah, do they drink to get drunk or are they binge-drinking?	[Opens inquiry] (a)
138) M: Well, it's drinking to get drunk ((mild response))	[Repeated phrase FT] (a)
139) F: Indians drink to pass out ((strong response))	[Semantic extension] (b)
140) M: Yeah, idea is to lay you flat out on the floor ((severe))	[Semantic extension] (c)
141) C: Okay. Drink to get drunk ((modifies tone))	[Repeated phrase FT] (a)
—Nation-6 (page 27 of 138 in the transcript)	

This discussion segment occurred early in the interview. Like those from the other groups, this excerpt shows that participants were aware of various outsider-imposed drinking images. The man repeating the moderator's phrasing, "to get drunk" (138) is following her line of inquiry. When participants extend what it means "to get drunk" (139–140), the moderator modifies tone and accepts confirmation that local drinking is close to but not at a level of binge drinking (141).

This next example offers ideas on what leads to teenage drinking, how teens acquire alcohol (141–145), and why they might consume alcohol (211–213). This excerpt illustrates co-production of data that are collated [compiled] by format ties, following comments from a female participant on drinking by youth who are unemployed. She concludes "because they don't know what to do with themselves" (line 140, not shown).

141) F: Too much free time	[Offers explanation] (a)
142) F: Yeah, too much free time	[Repeated phrase FT] (a)
143) F: And then somebody comes around with a drink, everybody gets drunk	[Offers explanation] (b) [Semantic extension] (c)
144) C: There is always somebody who provides it	[Repeated word FT] (b)
145) several: Uh huh, there's always somebody	[Repeated phrase FT] (b)
—Nation-1 (page 18 of 81 in the transcript)	

A situation that might lead to teenage drinking ("too much free time") is ratified by a repeated phrase (142) and expanded by the moderator to suggest how teens acquire alcohol ("always somebody who provides it"), which is ratified by several participants (145). Within five lines, useful data are elicited from and confirmed by several participants and collated by format ties. Although the reasons for use varied slightly, how teens gained access to alcohol was a concern across all the five tribes. In this example, somebody provides it to local teenagers who lack the social models for more appropriate use of their time.

HUMOR IN THE FOCUS GROUPS

Humor requires timing and understanding (Norrick 2003). Although joking can minimize adversity, buffer troublesome tensions, and offer respite from what is unpleasant (Kinsman and Gregory 2004), use of humor in the focus groups emphasized “receptive competence” (Philips 1983:50) and “supportive laughter” served “to ease the conversation” when discussing traumatic conditions (Mkandawire and Stevens 2010:691). When participants clarified issues of concern and strands of new data were spoken quickly in short phrases, format ties and humor readily appeared. Humor acted to generate the laughter, drawing participants into the discussion and acting as a “social lubricant” (O’Nell and Mitchell 1996:573). Format ties in turn served to collate loose strands of data by identifying connected ideas as well as confirm their validity by repeating the core information. Through laughter, participants “affiliated” [created a partnership] and “ratified” [confirmed] discussion segments that co-produced a fuller view of a to-be-resolved problem (Glenn 2003). According to Norrick (1993, 2003) conflict among spontaneous speakers in multiparty talk can be “repaired” by laughter. Similarly, humor in the focus groups served to unveil significant issues that would require “repair” and resolution outside the convened setting.

Despite tribe-centered discussion by each focus group, participants were familiar with the stylistic humor (Lincoln 1993; Powers 1994) and pan-Indian imagery of revitalization (Cheshire 2001; Gone 2007) used to combat Native American and Alaska Native stereotypes. Messages in focus group humor warned against using outsider therapy to cure alcoholism. Affirming tribal identity through language removes reliance on outsider-propelled individualism and strengthens self-image (Gone 2007; Trechter 2001; Walters, Simoni, and Evans-Campbell 2002). A female narrator of a “redemption narrative” in Spicer (1996:147), for example, during a difficult period in her life, remembers how her grandmothers “used to have so much humor …. Indian humor was so beautiful.” Theorists point to this survival factor in the salutary lessons of Indian humor (e.g., Basso 1996; Lincoln). In the focus groups, humor brought participants closer together, grounded the focus group as a convened forum to explore the effects of alcohol on reservations, and continued the practice of utilizing humor to communicate messages of tribal autonomy. In one interview (Nation-5), as mentioned earlier, a woman offered: “Laughing …. We call ‘making it through’; that’s the only way.”

Sometimes humor came early and was inserted into talk on major issues at the outset of the interview. We return to a point offered earlier in the focus group presented.

002) M: Goes quite a ways back … Columbus’ time	[Offers explanation] (a)
((Group Laughter))	[Group-affiliated] (a)
003) M: He didn’t bring a wig full of alcohol ((sets-up hyperbole))	[Columbus FT] (a)
He had a ship full of alcohol ((verbalizes hyperbole))	[Columbus FT] (a)

—Nation-6 (page 2 of 138 in the transcript)

Ratifying a comment (second line of the transcript) with laughter and its semantic elaboration by the second male speaker, demonstrates awareness of the problem. The speaker poignantly states how Columbus, as European embodiment, did not limit the practice of drinking to himself ("wig full"), but instead transmitted it to others ("ship full"), implying that this is why problems faced by generations of Indians occurred. A "wig full of alcohol" alludes to Columbus as the source of alcohol-clouded thinking that is found on reservations today ("wig" represents the artificial).

One area where format ties and use of humor were intensified [increased by clustering] was revealing popular names (Moore 2004) for local drinking sites. Teufel (1994:91) called these sites "drinking spots." Three tribes provided a lengthy discussion where sites and their corresponding practices (container hierarchies, dancing flirtation, among others) were described within the first 2 to 4 pages of a 100-plus-page transcript. This excerpt came from one of the three.

036) C: Do you guys have names for some of these drinking spots?	[Opens inquiry] (a)
037) F: Worn Hands ((couplet))	[Offers response] (a)
038) F: Worn Hands. It's a park near here	[Repeated phrase FT] (a)
039) F: Is that what it's called? ((unfamiliar with term))	[Seeks clarification] (a)
040) C: Are there other places? One tribe called a place Moon-Walk	[Expands inquiry] (b)
041) F: Moon-shine! ((word play on couplet in line 040))	[Semantic extension] (a)
((Group Laughter))	[Group-affiliated] (b)
042) F: Yeah, Companion Rocks ((couplet continues word play))	[Offers response] (c)
[Portion omitted on High-Road, Sparrow Garden, Randy Murphy, and Rivers Park]	
049) F: There's Benson's Lot ((couplet continues word play))	[Syntactic match FT] (a)
((Group Laughter))	[Group-affiliated] (d)
People go up there and drink	[Offers explanation] (e)
050) F: Where's that? ((seeks clarification))	[Maintains thread] (e)
051) F: At Benson's Lot right across the park ((couplet))	[Offers clarification] (e)
052) M: Oh—I thought you said Fenceless Lot ((word play))	[Syntactic match FT] (a)
((Group Laughter))	[Group-ratified] (e)
053) F: Yeah, that too ((draws closure))	[Confirms extension] (e)
	—Nation-3 (page 3 of 168 in transcript)

In this excerpt, participants identify examples of drinking sites, each as a couplet. When the moderator offers an example from another tribe, a female participant playfully transforms "Moon-Walk" into "Moon-Shine." Participants continue to name sites, until closure occurs when a male speaker alters "Benson's Lot" to "Fenceless Lot." (The next speaker shifts the topic to drinking among elders.) Other focus groups indicated that abandoned property and stream beds served as places to drink. Place-names according to Basso (1996) provide a means for "remembering and imagining" (5), "typically concise" and "closely plotted" locations (33), which permit one "to travel in their mind … in historic time and space" (89). Ultimately, place-names revive "former times," which can lead to revision (Basso:6). Across the focus groups, when participant talk shifted to adolescent drinking, no names for teen

sites were volunteered. Those who spoke took longer turns to explain their ideas and to offer opinions, assessing aspects of the contemporary situation based on their personal experience (e.g., observations of family, work site, or residence near a park).

Given a social expectation that adults share a continuing role to nurture, to instruct, and to supervise future generations (Cheshire 2001; Gone 2007; Philips 1983; Stubben 2001), intrinsic relationships of adults to teens gave them the right to speak. Groups required no linguistic device to generate affiliation to the task at hand, when adolescents became the topic of concern. Once a topical area was differentiated and became part of the overall discussion, something interesting happened to the data beyond the absence of place-naming. When the discussion turned to youth and what they do as well as ways they are raised, humor was virtually nonexistent and use of format ties was minimized. Participants implicitly and explicitly highlighted the importance of effective adolescent models at the same time that adults were modeling a “sense of ownership” that teens should assume for themselves by not encroaching too much into what or how it should be done. Similarly, the use of humor was present within discussions of the source of historic trauma (e.g., Columbus and the wig), or when illustrating essential characteristics of a related practice (e.g., places where drinking takes place), but the humor disappeared when the conditions that created harmful social-economic consequences were reviewed for possible solutions.

DRINKING PAST AND PRESENT

One common theme throughout the focus groups was the differences in drinking practices “then” and “now” for each tribe. Participants elaborated on a lessened social control with newer practices that had unwanted consequences in relation to teenage access to commercial (distilled) alcohol and concerns for younger ages at which youth were beginning to drink. In the next excerpt, participants are considering traditional (fermented) beverages of the past. At first, little information is offered, until talk turns to the consequences of youthful drinking.

111) C: So when they used [traditional drink], did they, get drunk, when they used it?	
They didn’t get crazy or—((seeks clarification))	[Extends inquiry] (a)
112) F: No	{-Reference is unclear-}
113) C: They were more controlled—had more controlled behavior?	[Alternative] (a)
114) F: Slow, it was slow effecting, I think	[Semantic match] (a)
115) M: It was an all-night thing ((subtle parody))	[Semantic extension] (b)
((Group Laughter))	[Group-affiliated] (b)
116) F: From dusk to dawn	[Semantic match] (b)
[Omitted: group discusses whether people “passed out” or “got crazy”]	
122) C: Okay. So you never heard anybody say	[Extends inquiry] (a)
123) F: “God, a hangover”	[Offers response] (d)
124) C: ((continues)) That they got crazy, had crazy behavior	[Seeks clarification] (a)
125) F: No ((denies intent of question in 124))	[Offers response] (a)
126) F: They like to holler and scream	[Inverts the intent] (e)

127) M: That's when alcohol was involved	[Clarifies inquiry] (e)
128) C: Did they get—you said "hangovers"? ((seeks clarification))	[Repeated word FT] (d)
129) F: No, no hangovers, no nothing ((clarifies offered data))	[Miscues inquiry] (d)
130) F: No after-affects	[Individual-ratified] (d)
131) M: Sure don't	{-Reference is unclear-}
132) F: And you know, the kids never got into it the young people, or children	[Semantic extension] (f)
	[Semantic self-match] (f)
133) M: Except me ((playful hyperbole))	[Semantic extension] (g)
134) F: Except you ((acknowledges reference to past))	[Repeated word FT] (g)
But now, it seems like when parents drink, young ones get into it	[Sets boundaries] (h)
	[Offers clarification] (h)

—Nation-6 (pages 8–9 of 156 in the transcript)

As the moderator seeks information on potency ("effects"), participants offer ideas on a former beverage that had mild effects (114, 129–130) and permitted attendees to drink all night (115–116), in contrast to commercial alcohol (127) that led to a hangover (123) and less control (124, 126). A turning point in the process to retrieve better data on the past is marked by subtle parody through a playful extension of "slow effecting" (114) to "all-night thing" (115). Laughter ratifies that what participants are saying is what the moderator is seeking. Once clarified, a woman states that youth (young people, children) did not have access (132). When another woman contradicts her, "except me" (133), suggesting that she had access, the prior speaker clarifies that past differs from present, because contemporary youth in this tribe can access parental alcohol (134). That time periods differ in health effects is further clarified, as the excerpt continues.

135) C: Okay, we're getting into something—really good there	[Seeks new inquiry] (h)
((Group Laughter))	[Group-affiliated] (h)
Now, this is alcohol	[Clarifies boundaries] (b)
So, now, let's look at the difference. You said that—	[Seeks clarification] (h)
136) F: Uh-huh ((shows interest))	[Encouragement] (h)
137) C: Okay, now, so when parents use, children are using, right?	[Seeks clarification] (h)
	[Re-directs inquiry] (i)
138) F: Yeah	[Individual-ratified] (i)
139) C: The alcohol?	[Seeks clarification] (b)
140) F: They steal it from their parents or they	[Offers response] (j)
141) F: Pass out and leave it there	[Clarifies response] (k)
142) F: And then the kids get into it	[Clarifies response] (l)
143) C: Do they drink what their parents do sometimes?	[Seeks clarification] (m)
144) F: Yes	[Confirms teen use] (m)
145) F: Oh, no! ((playful parody))	[Individual-ratified] (m)
146) C: They drink what's left, right?	[Seeks clarification] (m)
147) F: Uh-huh, or they drink with them, either way, uh-huh	[Extends response] (m)

148) C: Okay. Okay. So, that's alcohol use.	[Accepts response] (b)

—Nation-6 (pages 9–11 of 156 in the transcript)

Gradually, the moderator grasps what participants are saying on fermented beverage availability versus commercial alcohol (135). Use of humor opens an opportunity for sensitive revelation to clarify that all-night festivities (115–116) were places of traditional beverages that differ from the current practices where children have access to commercial, distilled beverage alcohol (138, 140–142), including occasions when they drink with parents (146–147). Medicine (2007:12–14) pointed out that among known historical practices, secular drinking was "infrequent" and ritual drinking was "peaceful," which greatly minimized potential harm to actors and spectators alike.

In the final discussion segment, the theme shifts twice from that of traditional beverages. First shift (062–073) considers age at which young people might start drinking, and the second shift (100–112) describes how young people acquire commercial alcohol, today, which differs from times when focus group participants were young.

056) C: Okay, so the reservation—liquor is allowed to be sold?	[Opens inquiry] (a)
057) F: Allowed ((confirms question intent))	[Repeated word FT] (a)
058) M: It's open res ((couplet initiates discussion segment))	[Semantic extension] (a)
059) C: When did it become wet?	[Extends inquiry] (b)
060) M: Both wine, beer	[Re-directs inquiry] (c)
061) M: What's the drinking age, here?	[Extends inquiry] (d)
062) All: Twenty-one	[Group-ratified] (d)
063) C: Okay ((sustains inquiry))	[Repeated word FT] (a)
064) M: That's being abused also	[Extends inquiry] (c)
065) F: Legally	[Semantic extension] (c)
066) C: What would you say is the age when they begin to drink?	[Extends inquiry] (d)
067) M: Twelve	[Offers response] (d)
068) F: They start young	[Semantic match] (d)
069) C: About what age would you say?	[Seeks clarification] (d)
070) M: About eleven or twelve ((lowers onset estimate))	[Extends response] (d)
071) F: Twelve	[Individual-ratified] (d)
072) C: Eleven or twelve? ((seeks clarification))	[Repeated phrase FT] (d)
073) F: Yeah, about in there	[Individual-ratified] (d)
When they start stealing it ((playful parody))	[Re-directs inquiry] (e)
((Group Laughter))	[Group-ratified] (e)
Sneaking it on their folks ((specifies practice))	[Draws closure] (e)
[Portions omitted on home brews such as dandelion wine and berry bust wine, ratified as traditional, which, in conjunction with commercial alcohol, were both readily available]	

—Nation-4 (page 3 of 129 in transcript)

After the moderator confirms the reservation is “wet,” two facets of alcohol are discussed: first, the legal drinking age (everyone responds “twenty-one”); second, the onset age for teenage drinking. “Twenty-one” matches the National Minimum Drinking Age Act of 1984 for all 50 states. When someone suggests that teenagers acquire alcohol, “sneaking it on their folks” (73) the idea is dropped briefly until this thread is renewed in the next continuation, when places to obtain alcohol are identified.

098) C: Is there—so alcohol is easily accessible by—how?	[Seeks clarification] (m)
Bootleggers?	[Re-directs inquiry] (m)
099) M: Buy it at the stores. All the stores have it.	[Offers clarification] (m)
Taverns, that’s all we have on the res	[Further clarification] (m)
100) F: And the youth can get it if they give somebody of age money to buy it for them	[Extends inquiry] (m)
	[Offers explanation] (m)
101) C: What do they call those kinds of people?	[Seeks clarification] (n)
102) M: Buyers ((restrained hyperbole))	[Offers response] (n)
((Group Laughter))	[Group-ratified] (n)
103) C: Not bootleggers? ((seeks clarification))	[Repeated phrase FT] (n)
104) M: Something about contributors	[Semantic extension 102] (n)
105) C: Contributors? ((seeks clarification))	[Repeated word FT] (n)
106) M: Contributors to minors	[Semantic extension 104] (n)
107) C: Does the tribe have a law that—it’s illegal for someone to …	[Extends inquiry] (o)
108) M: … illegal for someone to contribute to a minor ((completes Moderator’s phrase)) (o)	
109) C: Contribute? ((seeks clarification))	[Repeated word FT] (o)
110) M: Is that enforced? ((seeks clarification))	[Extends inquiry] (p)
111) M: Well, at times, minors were caught and they wouldn’t tell them where they got it	[Offers information] (p)
	[Offers information] (p)
112) M: Plea bargain ((parody in couplet closes segment))	[Extends information] (q)
((Group Laughter))	[Group-ratified] (q)

—Nation-4 (page 7 of 129 in transcript)

The question whether “bootleggers” bring in alcohol, an experience of some reservations with border towns, receives a direct response that local businesses sell alcohol. The humor helps to expand discussion. Someone indicates that teenagers bypass the age restriction on alcohol by having someone of legal age purchase it for them, followed by the moderator’s inquiry on what to call this person (101), asking if the label for this individual is “bootlegger” (103). The phrase “somebody of age” (100) extends the talk on businesses that sell alcohol to teenage drinking.

This discussion segment illustrates the collation of information through short format ties consisting of repeated words (57, 63, 103, 105, 109) and repeated phrases (72, 76, 81, 83, 90), supplemented by semantic matches (68, 70, 77) and semantic extensions (58, 65, 81, 83, 104, 106, 108). Most statements are clarified (67, 70, 75, 95, 102, 111–112) and ratified (62, 71, 73, 102, 112), until the moderator curtails discussion (113) to hold talk to illegal

purchases. The opening and closing statements are each marked with a three-syllable couplet ("open res" 058; "plea bargain" 112), respectively. Humor plays an instrumental role in this discussion. Restrained hyperbole (102), followed by a repeated question (104 from 098), opens the opportunity for a dialogue on how the alcohol consumed by youth is secured through contracted intermediaries, whereas for the prior interview, teens consumed what they took or received from their parents, and for the first excerpt, participants broadly linked acquisition to "somebody" other than the drinker.

Similar to the other studied tribes, men in this focus group used politeness markers typically associated with women (Holmes 1990) and cooperative styles characteristic of female speech (Ardington 2006). Alternating male/female styles often occurred in discussions on youth and acted to limit gender restrictions (Crawford 2003) and to support the right of participating men to dialogue on cultural reproduction of effective ways to teach youth (Cheshire 2001). Alternate male/female styles also were used by women in the focus group discussions on adult drinking.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Ethnographers depend on informed respondents to contrast common and not-so-common practices before deciding validity. Key to validity is the credibility of the individuals who provide data: do they describe from expertise, or do they have experience to testify accurately, having made a transition from grounded real-world experience to continue building knowledge based on reported speech? Based on linguistic devices they adroitly incorporated, participants in the convened focus groups replicated this dimension of knowledge construction (for an opposing view that participants in non-native focus groups acquiesce to group pressures, see Hollander 2004; Myers 1998). Examining how the data were elicited and reported facilitates determining their representativeness, which ultimately increases the utility of resulting inferences and generalizations.

Highlights from the focus groups demonstrate that drinking was a concern for each tribe. Participants were aware that alcohol consumption too often has been associated with Native Americans and Alaska Native communities. Drinking practices were known by participants in their roles as spectators and/or actors in those settings where alcohol consumption took place on local reservations. Based on lived experience on the reservation, a few participants shared stories of loved ones who drank, and in a few cases their own story, as each participant explored through the convened focus group interview the issue of drinking on his or her reservation.

Adolescent drinking was a concern among participants for multiple means by which teens gained access, reasons why alcohol might replace more productive activities, ages when youth were starting to drink, and how adults might better model alternative behaviors and appropriate responses to the presence of alcohol. Participants expressed concerns, but acknowledged teenage drinking without judging adolescents they knew and without anecdotes similar to those they told on adult drinking from personalized experience as spectators of or former actors in the behavior. Humor that enlivened the focus group and brought everyone into discussion of adult drinking was absent when discussing teenage

drinking and absent on serious aspects of historic trauma. Format ties wove together shared concerns. Reflecting on their access to alcohol as teenagers, participants recognized that traditional beverage use was monitored, which lessened the risks, compared to recent practices where less control results in more severe consequences. Despite published concerns for differences in female and male drinking (Kunitz 2006; Teufel 1994; Leland 1978), no focus group identified gender variation. Instead, participants expressed concern over the complicity by which teenagers secured alcohol from adult intermediaries, took it when it was shared willingly or where parents had passed out, or "snuck it" without parental consent.[5]

Focus group findings crafted through linguistic analysis can lead to productive work, when collaborating with local experts. We call this approach to initiate talk with local experts "inquiry points," which stand in opposition to "talking points" intended to promote an agenda. Once begun, professional collaboration can lead to configuring focus group data into messages, local policy, or plans for prevention and/or treatment interventions, where each is grounded in local concepts and self-reflection on strengths of a native way of life. By stepping beyond conventional boundaries of reporting research findings, we open dialogue on how one derives results in relation to their application within and return to the local community serving as the research setting.

From the focus groups, we might ask ourselves: What might a response to Native American and Alaska Native drinking look like and sound like? We purposely selected excerpts to illustrate common concerns. Analysis of focus group data emphasized the integral importance of language to individual tribal autonomy. General practices inferred from stylistic focus group discussions might include (a) honor Native American and Alaska Native speech in oral discussions on issues related to alcohol consumption, where use of humor highlights local speaking styles (see Herring and Meggert 1994 on use of humor for counseling Native American children); (b) include Native American and Alaska Native language patterns in tribal documents, even when they are written in English (see Cheshire 2001 on the revitalization of Indian culture among native families); and (c) adapt concepts and images of a tribe-centered lifestyle (see Gone 2007 on connectedness among locally common cultural concepts). Potential inquiry points might serve as a first step in working with tribal experts, but require ongoing work to mold them into culturally responsive initiatives (see Smith-Morris 2006 on diabetes initiatives supported by collaborative fieldwork). Working collaboratively with the Native Diabetes Project in Canada, Rebecca Hagey (1989:13) described her experience of "translating knowledge into action [through] a process of sharing, reacting, and coming to understand each other's conceptions [that] does not force acceptance [but] allows each to look in and see what they would like to take."

Considering the content of these focus group interviews in relation to adolescent drinking and the resultant findings strengthened by linguistic analysis, preliminary inquiry points might include ideas on providing teenagers with models for expected behavior: (d) dialogue

[5]Consequences of drinking have been described in other publications (Yuan et al 2010). "Abuse" ' and "violence" were discussed one or more times during the interview by all five tribes, and "accidents" and "hangover" were discussed by three tribes. Participants expanded discussions by naming additional problems, such as a loss of work by adults and birth defects in infants.

on ways that adolescents obtain alcohol; (e) teach adults and teens effective action models beneficial to the community; (f) warn against unattended alcohol access by children; (g) hold workshops for underage youth that incorporate stories from teens and adults; (h) reinforce a caution to adults, parents, and related caregivers that “children are watching”; and (i) create a sense of ownership for adolescent drinking programs, “by teens, for teens.” Each of these is grounded in excerpts from the focus group discussions presented previously on the practices of “then” and “now” (and further supported by omitted focus group data). Findings from focus group analysis requires thorough review by a community before adaptation [modify to fit a population] into a linguistically and culturally appropriate policy, message, or intervention for treatment and prevention (Gandelman and Rietmeijer 2005; Kreuter et al. 2003; compare Taylor 2007). Related to concerns for adolescent well-being, four tribes reported mechanisms for cultural transmission to teenagers: two described “culture camps” designed for reservation youth; one organized an “Indian week” for adults and teens; and another sponsored an intergenerational retreat where local land formations were visited and discussed. Each tribe also held one or more forms of a community-wide event such as rodeos, special seasonal festivals, and/or pow-wows.

What did we learn from this analysis? Focus groups work well with participants willing to share from varied experiences. Recognizing disadvantages and advantages of group interviews helps to avoid assuming that collected materials always will represent even coverage of desired concerns (Kratz 2010), or that many people automatically will extend the range of provided data. In our analysis, one limitation was a stated purpose of the focus groups to review the survey protocol used by the larger project, mixed with a wish to learn more about alcohol problems qualitatively to gain a context for interpreting the survey. To not “prime” [sensitize] the respondents with a preliminary discussion of the quantitative format, the qualitative discussion always preceded review of the survey protocol. Another limitation was reviewing transcripts created originally for the content-review, without re-listening to the tapes to examine the nuances of “group laughter” (Glenn 2003; Norrick 2003).

When lacking behind-the-scenes knowledge of a convened discussion, linguistic inquiry can guide the analysis. Focus group facilitation requires a moderator who is skilled at facilitation with the willingness to immerse into format ties and linguistic devices typical of the convened group. For the focus group interviews that we analyzed, this meant adeptness to include male and female speakers, a common feature of all the focus groups regardless of geographic locale; shifts within discussion segments where ideas flow quickly and concisely versus times when speakers take longer turns; and alternating speech styles, when the participants are familiar with the native language. A moderator comfortable with local speech practices (Daley et al. 2010; Kratz 2010; Teufel-Shone and Williams 2010) will encourage humor to facilitate the elicitation of sensitive data. Format ties are innate to these speech repertoires.

Focus groups provide another way to develop and/or to strengthen prevention initiatives among Native American and Alaska Native communities by working collaboratively with local experts (Basso 1996; Hagey 1989; Smith-Morris 2006; Stubben 2001). Interventions, policies, and messages require awareness of “the complexity of local knowledge” (Prussing

2008:371), cultural meanings generated by particular self-representations related to drinking (O'Nell 1999; Spicer 2001), and adaptation to a tribe's circumstances (Gone 2007, 2006; Gone and Alcántara 2007; Milbrodt 2002; Walters et al. 2002), specific to age (O'Nell and Mitchell 1996) and gender (Kreuter et al. 2003). Collaboration informed by inquiry points can facilitate talk with specialists, local educators, political leaders, council members, professionals seeking to design ethnographic research, and community members that express an interest in problem resolution, among others.

When taken seriously, humor highlights the facets of collective identity that buffer historic trauma amidst conditions of oppression and learned hopelessness, which provides the backdrop for the absence of humor that marks a concern that has yet to be resolved. Format ties weave together these common concerns. Participants can move a focus group from an artificial speech encounter to one where real-world practices invigorate and organize discussion. Analysis must identify these linguistic devices to improve the extraction of health information, based on careful review and meaningful analysis, which can lead to evidence-based inquiry points and an eventual collaboration between researchers and local community experts for recommending policies and developing effective interventions and educational messages.

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