



Voices That Echo: The Power of Collective Storytelling as a Pathway Out of Internalized Voicelessness Among BIPOC Communities

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Abstract

Collective storytelling has emerged as a vital praxis for BIPOC communities seeking to reclaim agency and counter pervasive silencing. This paper synthesizes over 2 decades of interdisciplinary scholarship to examine how shared narrative spaces function as pathways out of internalized voicelessness. Drawing on critical race theory, liberation psychology, and decolonial frameworks, I conducted a systematic literature review of empirical and theoretical works (2000–2025) that foreground collective storytelling modalities, such as story circles, digital oral histories, and community performance. The thematic analysis identified three core dimensions through which collective narratives engender empowerment: (a) emotional resonance and validation, wherein participants experience affective alignment and mutual recognition; (b) identity reclamation and re authoring, through which individuals reconstruct self narratives counter to dominant, oppressive discourses; and (c) solidarity networks and collective agency, wherein shared stories cultivate communal bonds that catalyze social action. Case studies from Black Truth Be Told initiatives to Indigenous oral history revitalization illustrate the transformative potential and contextual variations of these mechanisms. The study further highlighted emergent challenges, including sustaining intergenerational transmission and scaling digital platforms without diluting cultural specificity. Implications for practitioners and researchers are discussed, underscoring the need for intersectional, longitudinal evaluations of narrative interventions. By charting the contours of voices that echo, this review offers a conceptual scaffold for designing, implementing, and assessing collective storytelling as a decolonial strategy for healing, solidarity, and social change.

Keywords: collective storytelling, internalized voicelessness, BIPOC empowerment, narrative counter storytelling, decolonial healing practices

1. Introduction

The persistent silencing of BIPOC voices in colonial, racialized, and systemic contexts is a multifaceted issue deeply rooted in historical and contemporary structures of power. Colonial systems have long suppressed the voices of Aboriginal people, as seen in Canadian legal discourse where Aboriginal laws and evidence are often excluded, perpetuating ongoing

colonization and legal marginalization (Vermette, 2009). This silencing extends to educational settings, where Eurocentric epistemologies dominate, marginalizing BIPOC perspectives and perpetuating racial capitalism and epistemicide (Wright, 2022). In higher education, BIPOC graduate teaching assistants face racialized and colonial oppression, experiencing disrespect and microaggressions from students and supervisors, yet they also find meaning and transformation in their roles, highlighting the dual nature of their experiences (Park et al., 2024). Similarly, urban Aboriginal women encounter structural violence in health services, where their voices are often silenced, leading to delayed care and acceptance of inadequate services.

However, community-based centers offer spaces where their voices are more respected, illustrating the potential for change when BIPOC voices are centered (Kurtz et al., 2008, 2013). The medical field also grapples with systemic racism, where oppressive structures exacerbate health disparities for BIPOC individuals, underscoring the need for medicine to actively participate in redefining these systems to alleviate power disparities (Aaron & Stanford, 2022). Furthermore, the dynamics of silencing and resistance are evident in public debates about racism and colonialism, where the voices of a few are amplified, yet the diversity of BIPOC experiences is often overlooked, leading to new forms of silencing (Wilopo & Dijkema, 2024). These examples demonstrate the pervasive nature of silencing across various domains and the critical need for systemic change to amplify and respect BIPOC voices, fostering environments where they can thrive and contribute meaningfully to societal transformation.

The phenomenon of internalized voicelessness and its intergenerational impact is a complex issue deeply rooted in the transmission of trauma across generations. Internalized voicelessness often manifests as a silence surrounding traumatic experiences, which can be passed down from one generation to the next without explicit verbal communication. This silence is a coping mechanism that families use to manage intolerable experiences, often leading to a lack of open discussion about trauma, as seen in the cases of Holocaust survivors and their descendants, where unspoken traumas continue to affect mental health across generations (Abrams, 1999). The concept of intergenerational trauma is not limited to war experiences but is prevalent in various contexts, including immigrant and refugee families who have endured war, genocide, and displacement, leading to silent suffering and mental health challenges in subsequent generations (Wheeler, 2022; Wu, 2022).

This silence can be seen as a form of internalized voicelessness, where the descendants of trauma survivors inherit the psychological burdens without direct exposure to the original events (Wheeler, 2022; Wu, 2022). In the context of Black families, historical and race-based trauma further compounds this silence, necessitating trauma-informed and socioculturally attuned therapeutic approaches to address these deep-seated issues (Lee et al., 2023). The struggle for voice and the impact of silence are also explored in cultural narratives, such as Zora Neale Hurston's "Their Eyes Were Watching God," where the protagonist's journey to find her voice against societal and relational silences reflects broader themes of voicelessness and empowerment (Racine, 1994). Similarly, in Laurie Halse Anderson's "Speak," the protagonist's journey from silence to voice highlights the personal and societal challenges of articulating trauma (O'Quinn, 2000). The intergenerational transmission of trauma, whether through family systems, cultural narratives, or societal structures, underscores the need for active intervention strategies to break the cycle of silence and voicelessness, thereby promoting healing and resilience in future generations (Ullah et al., 2023).

2. Rationale for Study

Collective storytelling has emerged as an urgent praxis in the current sociopolitical climate due to its potential to foster understanding, mobilize action, and promote social change across diverse contexts. The power of storytelling lies in its ability to bridge gaps between research, policy, and practice. This is seen in the educational sector where storytelling is used to make research more accessible and engaging, thereby closing the research-practice gap and improving educational outcomes (Ziegler, 2020). In the realm of climate change, narratives are crucial for shaping public understanding and motivating collective action, as they help individuals and communities envision future scenarios and the roles they might play in addressing climate challenges (McMeeking et al., 2024). Storytelling also plays a pivotal role in social movements, where it serves as a tool for organizing protest and advocating for social justice, as demonstrated in the case of the Ayotzinapa disappearances in Mexico, where storytelling was used to challenge government narratives and mobilize civil society (Meneses Rocha & Castillo González, 2016).

Furthermore, storytelling is instrumental in empowering marginalized communities, such as sexual minority refugees, by providing a platform for collective resistance and healing, thus highlighting its role in fostering resilience and social justice (Papadopoulos et al., 2023). Despite its widespread application, there is a notable research gap in integrating diverse storytelling modalities with liberation outcomes. This gap is evident in the need for methodologies that allow for collaborative storytelling, where communities and researchers co-create narratives that reflect shared experiences and values, as seen in climate science collaborations inspired by Shakespearean practices (Shenk et al., 2023; Shenk & Gutowski, 2022). Additionally, storytelling in participatory cultures is being explored as a soft technology for citizen empowerment, emphasizing its potential to build community and guide behavior in various domains, including activism and research (Gonçalves, 2016). The integration of storytelling into educational and social frameworks, as seen in the professional learning of teachers through collective storytelling, further underscores its capacity to challenge existing perspectives and promote social equity (Taylor, 2013). Therefore, the synthesis of storytelling practices across these diverse fields is crucial for realizing their full potential in achieving liberation and transformative outcomes in the current sociopolitical landscape.

The aim of this research was to critically examine how shared narrative spaces—such as story circles, digital oral history projects, community performance, and other collective storytelling modalities—serve as pathways out of internalized voicelessness, particularly within BIPOC communities. Internalized voicelessness refers to the deep-seated silencing that occurs when individuals and communities internalize dominant oppressive narratives, leading to diminished self-expression, self-worth, and agency.

This study sought to explore the mechanisms through which collective storytelling fosters empowerment, identity reclamation, and social solidarity. It investigated how participants in these narrative spaces navigate the interplay between personal and communal narratives, challenge dominant discourses, and re-author their identities in ways that resist and subvert systems of marginalization. Furthermore, it aimed to identify both the transformative potentials and the practical challenges of sustaining these spaces across diverse cultural, geographic, and generational contexts.

3. Method

This study employed a systematic literature review combined with thematic analysis to investigate how collective storytelling functions as a pathway out of internalized voicelessness in BIPOC communities. Covering works published between 2000 and 2025, the review integrated both empirical and theoretical contributions across psychology, sociology, education, cultural studies, and community practice. This approach ensured that the analysis captured the breadth of storytelling modalities while situating them firmly within liberation-oriented and decolonial frameworks.

The data sources for this study were intentionally diverse. They included academic databases containing peer-reviewed articles, monographs, and dissertations; grey literature such as community reports, activist publications, and program evaluations; and cultural or artistic documentation, including digital archives, performance projects, and oral history initiatives. Bringing together these sources allowed for a more holistic understanding of collective storytelling, bridging the gap between academic theorization and community-based practices.

The inclusion and exclusion criteria were defined with care to maintain rigor. Studies were included if they explicitly examined storytelling as a central practice, engaged BIPOC or other marginalized communities as the primary focus, and connected narrative work to empowerment, healing, or systemic change. Works that offered purely descriptive accounts of storytelling without analyzing outcomes related to empowerment, liberation, or systemic transformation were excluded. By clarifying these criteria, the review emphasized both the analytical and transformative dimensions of storytelling.

The analysis followed a thematic approach. Collected works were coded according to storytelling modalities such as story circles, digital oral histories, artistic performances, testimonials, and activist counter-narratives. The coded data were then cross-compared to map outcomes across different modalities, highlighting how storytelling supported emotional resonance, identity reclamation, solidarity, and collective agency. Reflexivity and positionality were integral to this process. The researcher remained attentive to their own standpoint in relation to BIPOC narratives and decolonial commitments, thereby ensuring sensitivity to the power dynamics embedded in interpretation and representation.

To ground theoretical insights in lived practice, the study also examined two emblematic case studies. The first focused on the Black Truth Be Told initiatives within the U.S. reparations movement, which integrate art, activism, and healing to disrupt dominant myths, foster public empathy, and catalyze racial justice dialogues. The second explored Indigenous oral history revitalization efforts that center elders, youth engagement, and language preservation as acts of cultural sovereignty and intergenerational healing. These cases, encompassing digital storytelling, language revitalization projects, and intergenerational programs, were selected for their diversity of modalities, strong cultural grounding, and their demonstrated capacity to illuminate both the healing and systemic transformation made possible through collective storytelling.

4. Findings

4.1 Emotional Resonance and Validation

Emotional resonance and validation are complex constructs that involve affective alignment, recognition, and shared vulnerability, as explored across various contexts in the provided papers. Affective resonance, as defined by Mühlhoff (2015), involves a dynamic interplay of reciprocal modulation between individuals, where active and receptive affects are intertwined,

creating a shared emotional experience that is distinct from mere imitation or synchronization. This concept is further expanded in the context of social interactions, where affective resonance is seen as a process that emerges from embodied social interactions, emphasizing relationality over individualistic experiences (Mühlhoff, 2015). In the realm of shared vulnerability, Benvegnù (2017) discussed the ethical recognition of shared vulnerability through the lens of animal suffering, highlighting the paradoxical nature of identifying with nonhuman creatures to foster compassion and ethical awareness. This notion of shared vulnerability is also crucial in emotion-focused therapy for couples, where accurate perception and validation of a partner's vulnerability are essential for restructuring negative interaction cycles and building positive emotional bonds (Wiesel et al., 2021). Validation, as a communication technique, involves recognizing and acknowledging others' emotional states, which is essential for empathetic dialogue and fostering emotional connections, as demonstrated in human-AI interactions (Pang et al., 2024).

In brand innovation, emotional resonance is strategically leveraged to create profound connections with consumers, using emotion recognition technologies to evoke specific emotions and enhance brand identity (Hu, 2024). Similarly, in the traditional music market, emotional resonance significantly influences consumer behavior, affecting cognitive evaluations and participation levels (Li et al., 2024). The political and ethical potential of affective resonance is also explored in organizational settings, where shared emotional experiences can challenge political pressures and foster collective opposition (Pors, 2019). Lastly, in the context of transgender communities, emotional resonance is achieved through interpersonal emotion work and motivational framing, which align collective action frames with the emotional lives of individuals, facilitating engagement and identity resolution (Schrock et al., 2004). Together, these studies illustrate the multifaceted nature of emotional resonance and validation, underscoring their importance in various interpersonal, therapeutic, and organizational contexts.

Story sharing serves as a mirror and a mechanism for collective emotional release by engaging both individual and collective emotional processes. The mirroring of emotions, as discussed by Sowden et al. (2021), involves the brain's response to observed emotions, which overlaps with experienced emotions, suggesting a neural basis for empathy and shared emotional experiences. This mirroring mechanism is further elaborated by Fogassi (2013), who described it as a neural system that resonates with observed behaviors, facilitating an automatic understanding of others' emotions and intentions. In the context of storytelling, this mirroring can be seen as a way to reflect and resonate with the emotions of others, creating a shared emotional experience. The concept of collective emotions, as explored by Thonhauser (2021), highlights the social and interactive nature of emotions, distinguishing between different types of collective emotional experiences such as emotional sharing and emotional contagion. Story sharing can act as a catalyst for these collective emotions, providing a platform for emotional contagion and shared emotional experiences.

Rimé et al. (2020) emphasized the complex process of social sharing of emotions, which not only facilitates emotional release but also impacts interpersonal relationships and broader social structures. This aligns with the findings of Alawafi et al. (2021), who noted that storytelling interventions can introduce positivity, hope, and coping mechanisms, impacting emotions and social interactions. The notion of a *deep story*, proposed by Sawicka (2024), further supports the idea that storytelling can create a social space for collective emotional dynamics, where emotions are collaboratively generated and integrated into group-based cognitive and affective elements. Thus, story sharing functions as a mirror by reflecting and resonating with individual and collective emotions, while also serving as a mechanism for

collective emotional release by facilitating shared emotional experiences and social interactions.

4.2 Identity Reclamation and Re-Authoring

Identity reclamation and re-authoring through rewriting self-narratives counter to dominant oppressive discourses is a multifaceted process that involves the strategic use of counter-storytelling to challenge and transform prevailing narratives. Counter-storytelling, as explored by Pender et al. (2022), is a narrative process that allows marginalized individuals, particularly racially and economically marginalized emerging adults, to reclaim their identities and challenge injustice by creating narratives that contrast with dominant oppressive narratives. This process is not only about resisting oppressive narratives but also about creating new, empowering representations of identity, as seen in the work of modern Egyptian female writers who reimagine traditional folk tales to challenge patriarchal and colonial discourses (Elgamal, 2024). Similarly, women of color in academia use counter-narratives to manage and reconfigure their identities, consciously making visible facets of their identity that have been historically absent in higher education (Motha & Varghese, 2018).

The autobiographies of ex-slaves like Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs also exemplify this process, as they rewrote their identities to fit dominant cultural norms while simultaneously resisting the erasure of their experiences and identities by slaveholding society. Furthermore, the narratives of Toni Morrison highlight the importance of creating counter-narratives to voice against dominant narratives, particularly in the context of African American identity (Kumar et al., 2020). These narratives serve as powerful tools of self-expression and identity formation, allowing individuals to navigate and resist the constraints imposed by dominant cultural myths and narratives (Mahiri & Godley, 1998). The success of these counter-narratives, however, depends on their uptake by the dominant group, which can be challenging due to various narrative strategies employed to maintain the status quo (Lindemann, 2019). Overall, the process of identity reclamation and re-authoring through counter-narratives is a dynamic and ongoing effort to assert individual and collective identities against oppressive societal narratives.

Rewriting self-narratives significantly impacts self-concept, cultural pride, and resilience by providing individuals with a framework to reinterpret their identities and experiences. Personal narratives are central to the constitution of human identity, as they allow individuals to structure and conceive their lives through stories; this can be liberating when these narratives are reconstructed to externalize and dissolve problems in a new context (Milivojević & Nikolić, 2017). This process is particularly crucial in challenging situations, such as dealing with illness or adversity, where maintaining a coherent self-concept is vital for psychological resilience. For instance, cancer patients and survivors benefit from narrative interventions that help them reconstruct their self-concept and enhance resilience by integrating their past, present, and future experiences into a cohesive story (S. & Sheelam, 2024).

Similarly, early career English teachers develop resilience through self-narratives that help them navigate professional challenges, demonstrating a V-shaped developmental trajectory influenced by personal and contextual factors (Duan et al., 2023). In the context of cultural identity, rewriting self-narratives can foster cultural pride and confidence, as seen in educational interventions that integrate cultural content, leading to improved cultural identity and engagement (Li & Wei, 2024). Moreover, narrative identity theory suggests that a strong narrative identity provides a robust structure for the self, promoting resilience during instability by enhancing self-concept clarity and stability (Dirghangi & Wong, 2022). This is echoed in the context of dementia, where narrative approaches help individuals maintain a sense of self and resilience despite cognitive challenges (Angus & Bowen-Osborne, 2014). Additionally,

literary therapy interventions have been shown to enhance ego-resilience and reduce maladaptive behavior in children from broken homes, further illustrating the transformative power of narrative rewriting. Overall, the process of rewriting self-narratives not only aids in personal resilience and self-concept clarity but also enhances cultural pride and identity, underscoring the importance of narrative interventions across various contexts.

4.3 Solidarity Networks and Collective Agency

Storytelling serves as a powerful catalyst for fostering communal bonds and coordinated action within solidarity networks, as evidenced by various studies. Solidarity, as a concept, is deeply rooted in shared practices and collective commitments, which are often articulated and reinforced through storytelling. In the context of public health, storytelling can help bridge the gap between individuals and institutions by promoting a shared understanding of social justice and health equity, as seen during the COVID-19 pandemic where disparities in health outcomes highlighted the need for collective action and solidarity (Moore et al., 2023). Storytelling within solidaristic communities can challenge oppression and foster agency by promoting a form of listening that respects differences and encourages reciprocal exchanges, thus strengthening communal bonds (Jones & Fulfer, 2024). Furthermore, storytelling in feminist social justice organizations, as Weatherall (2020) noted, can integrate diverse cultural knowledge and emphasize collective histories, thereby fostering solidarity and a sense of shared purpose among members. In the realm of consumption networks, storytelling plays a crucial role in gelling social links and enabling the emergence of solidarity networks, as demonstrated by the Italian consumption network Spesasospesa.org during the COVID-19 lockdowns (Fuschillo & D'Antone, 2022). Additionally, storytelling can facilitate the formation of transindividual social platforms, where collective identities are continuously reconstituted through shared narratives and actions, as seen in various social movements across southern Europe (Cvejic, 2022). In urban contexts, storytelling contributes to the resilience of communities by promoting mutualism and collaboration, which are essential for building urban solidarity networks that can withstand crises (Benedetti et al., 2020). Overall, storytelling not only strengthens existing communal bonds but also acts as a catalyst for coordinated action by providing a shared narrative that aligns individual and collective goals, thus enhancing the efficacy of solidarity networks in addressing social and health challenges.

Solidarity networks and collective agency play a crucial role in influencing grassroots policy, particularly in contexts of social and economic crises. These networks, as discussed in various studies, are instrumental in mobilizing communities to address systemic issues and advocate for change. For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, grassroots solidarity initiatives in Valencia, Spain, emerged as a form of social innovation, demonstrating the potential for social transformation through collective action (Salom-Carrasco, 2022). Similarly, in Greece, solidarity networks have been pivotal in resisting austerity measures and fostering a social economy that challenges existing socio-economic relations (Arampatzi, 2017).

These networks often operate in environments where traditional institutions fail to meet socio-economic demands, as seen in the case of grassroots activism during economic crises, which highlights the redundancy of collective actions in fostering sustainable community-led initiatives (D'Alisa et al., 2015). In sub-Saharan Africa, community-driven needs mapping and solidarity economics have been effective in resource-depleted communities, showcasing how grassroots efforts can fill gaps left by inadequate state involvement (Che, 2018). Furthermore, solidarity networks supporting migrants in Europe, such as those in Lampedusa and the Susa Valley, illustrate how these networks interact with mobility practices and confront border authorities, thereby influencing migration policies (Filippi et al., 2021). The concept of mass agency, as proposed by Richardson (2024), suggests that large, complex networks of organizers

and supporters can drive transformative social change, emphasizing the importance of solidarity in achieving collective goals. Overall, these studies underscore the significance of solidarity networks in grassroots policy influence, highlighting their capacity to mobilize resources, foster cooperation, and challenge existing power structures to achieve social justice and equity (Moore et al., 2023; Smith, 2009).

4.4 Three Theoretical Anchors

Storytelling, particularly through the lens of critical race theory (CRT), serves as a powerful tool for highlighting and challenging systemic racism and exclusionary practices across various domains, including education, health, and academia. CRT emphasizes the importance of counter-storytelling, which allows marginalized groups to share their lived experiences and truths, thereby challenging dominant narratives that often perpetuate racial inequities. For instance, in the context of education, storytelling is used to expose the hidden exclusionary practice of *off-rolling* that disproportionately affects Black students, pushing them into spaces beyond care and inclusion (Bei & Knowler, 2022). Similarly, storytelling in health contexts provides a platform for Black women to articulate their unique, intersectional experiences, offering a counternarrative to dominant discourses that often marginalize their voices (Carter, 2019). Digital storytelling, as explored in educational settings, enables students to grapple with how race shapes their identities and institutional experiences, thus fostering conversations about racial justice (Rolón-Dow, 2011). In academia, antiracist storytelling by Latinx graduate students and faculty highlights the structural racism and power dynamics that persist, advocating for change within these spaces (Fernandez et al., 2022). Furthermore, the narrative policy framework (NPF) illustrates how storytelling in political contexts can influence public opinion and policy, as seen in the debates surrounding CRT itself (Bertrand et al., 2023). The Black Urban Storytelling framework and Critical Race Tourism further expand on CRT's storytelling approach by addressing the nuanced experiences of Black communities and promoting racial reconciliation through the amplification of marginalized voices (Benjamin & Laughter, 2022; Blacknell, 2024). Overall, storytelling within CRT not only reveals the pervasive nature of racism but also serves as a form of resistance and empowerment, urging a critical examination of societal structures and advocating for systemic change (Bowman et al., 2008; Cannon & Tuchinda, 2021).

Storytelling within the framework of liberation psychology serves as a powerful tool for healing, empowerment, and resistance against oppression across diverse contexts. In the study of Aboriginal elders in Australia, storytelling was utilized to recover historical memory and challenge dominant narratives that perpetuate colonial dispossession, thereby affirming identity and belonging within Aboriginal communities (Quayle et al., 2016). Similarly, the concept of *testimonio* in *mujerista* liberation psychology is employed as a decolonial feminist strategy to facilitate healing among Latinx communities. This approach emphasizes the importance of relational dialogues and critical social analysis to foster community well-being and radical hope (Fernández, 2022). In the United States, liberation psychology addresses the pervasive issues of hate and oppression by employing storytelling as a means of conscientization and praxis, helping marginalized communities confront and transform oppressive conditions (Edwards, 2023). Black storytellers in the U.S. also use narrative to disrupt institutional racism and affirm their identities, demonstrating how storytelling can be a daily practice of liberation (Waters, 2022). For adolescent offenders, storytelling provides a framework for introspection and personal growth, enabling them to confront and learn from their experiences (Sarrado Soldevila et al., 2007). LGBTQ+ refugees use storytelling to heal from trauma and social prejudices, highlighting the need for visibility and consciousness to drive social change (Torrella Barrufet, 2019). In the context of critical theory, storytelling is seen as a means of psychological empowerment and agency, as illustrated by the work of

Muhammad Iqbal (Ul-Haq, 2023). Women's breastfeeding stories reveal how storytelling can serve as an emancipatory intervention, allowing women to redefine their experiences and resist oppressive ideologies (Grassley & Nelms, 2009). In war-affected communities, storytelling acts as a trauma recovery intervention, breaking the silence of trauma and fostering resilience. Finally, in the acculturative integration of migrant populations, storytelling aids in the empowerment and self-construction process, enabling immigrants to navigate and transform their new social environments (García-Ramírez et al., 2011). Collectively, these studies underscore the multifaceted role of storytelling in liberation psychology as a means to heal, empower, and resist across various cultural and social landscapes.

Storytelling within decolonial frameworks serves as a powerful tool for challenging and transforming dominant narratives, fostering epistemological justice, and promoting social change. Ortiz (2022) emphasized the need to rethink storytelling in urban planning by incorporating Latin American decolonial concepts such as pluriverse and epistemological disobedience, which can help reshape planning practices to foster ontological relationality and healing. Similarly, storytelling in anticolonial geographies is highlighted as a method for interrogating coloniality and as a praxis for resistance, with stories acting as interventions that disrupt dominant discourses and inspire new conceptual frameworks (Clarke & Mullings, 2022). In the realm of decolonial feminism, storytelling legitimizes the knowledge of marginalized groups and offers a means to address precarity by recognizing the historical intersections of race and gender (González & Sánchez-Lasaballett, 2023). Wiebe (2019) discussed how mixed media storytelling can challenge settler-colonial narratives and create space for counternarratives, thus contributing to environmental justice and decolonial futures.

In South African universities, storytelling is seen as a subversive tool that can address the epistemic harm of colonialism and apartheid by prioritizing the lived experiences and stories of students, thereby affirming pluralist identities and worldviews (Davids, 2024). Collaborative autoethnography strengthens individual stories by weaving them together, challenging hegemonic power structures and reclaiming knowledge disrupted by colonization (Davalos et al., n.d.). In educational settings, storytelling enhances cultural awareness by allowing students to contrast their realities with dominant cultures, thus revealing and resisting imposed narratives (Martínez & Mar, 2018). Furthermore, storytelling in educational curricula facilitates the integration of Indigenous perspectives, promoting a decolonized understanding of history and culture (Ragoonaden et al., 2020). Overall, storytelling within decolonial frameworks is not merely a method of representation but a radical tool for creating new possibilities for understanding, resistance, and transformation across various contexts.

5. Case Studies

5.1 Black Truth Be Told Initiatives

The Truth Be Told initiatives within the Black reparations movement in the U.S. are multifaceted efforts aimed at addressing historical injustices and fostering racial reconciliation through truth-telling processes. These initiatives draw inspiration from the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, emphasizing restorative justice and engaging European Americans in dialogues about racial bias and privilege (Dybska, 2024). The intersection of art, activism, and healing plays a crucial role in these initiatives, as art serves as a powerful medium for social critique and public health advocacy. Artistic expressions such as photography, installations, and performance art communicate the complexities of structural inequality and promote empathy, which is essential for social transformation (Annet, 2024; Wilcox, 2009).

Art-based activism is particularly effective in fostering community engagement and addressing health disparities, as it provides therapeutic benefits and empowers marginalized communities to share their narratives (Kamanzi, 2024). The use of counter-narratives, especially those of Black women, disrupts dominant cultural myths and promotes ethical evolution, contributing to personal and collective healing (Daniel & Hoard, 2021). Initiatives like the Black American Tree Project exemplify how participatory art experiences can facilitate critical dialogues and reconciliation by exploring the historical and contemporary experiences of Black Americans (Najoli, 2024). Furthermore, art's role in truth and reconciliation efforts, as seen in Sierra Leone and Canada, highlights its potential to restore dignity, create empathy, and serve as a site of resistance and contestation (Hofheinz, 2023). Overall, the integration of art into these initiatives not only amplifies marginalized voices but also supports holistic health strategies and fosters social cohesion, making it an indispensable tool in the pursuit of racial justice and healing (Shin et al., 2023).

5.2 Indigenous Oral History Revitalization

Indigenous oral history revitalization is a multifaceted endeavor that involves the crucial roles of elders, youth engagement, and language preservation, all of which contribute to cultural sovereignty and intergenerational healing. Elders are pivotal in fostering intergenerational relationships, serving as custodians of traditional knowledge, language, and cultural practices. They utilize storytelling and sharing circles to impart wisdom and cultural identity to the youth, thereby strengthening community ties and promoting a positive cultural identity (Hausknecht et al., 2021; Yang & Warburton, 2018). Language revitalization movements, often led by indigenous intellectuals and activists, are acts of resistance against colonial linguistic domination. These movements aim to reclaim indigenous languages through community-based schools and advocacy, reinforcing cultural sovereignty and challenging colonial legacies (Wang & Bai, 2024).

The integration of digital storytelling and archival resources further supports language preservation and intergenerational healing by reclaiming cultural heritage and honoring the resilience of survivors of colonial systems like Indian Day Schools (George et al., 2024). The Ojibwe community's efforts to reclaim their worldview through language revitalization illustrate the mental, spiritual, emotional, and physical impacts of such initiatives, which are essential for healing from historical trauma (Rappeport et al., 2024). Moreover, intergenerational programs, such as summer camps, facilitate the transfer of cultural knowledge and language from elders to youth, ensuring the continuity of cultural practices and fostering a sense of belonging and identity among younger generations (Ross, 2016). Addressing historical trauma is critical in language cultivation, as it affects the wellbeing of indigenous communities. Indigenous ways of knowing and healing are vital in overcoming these challenges and strengthening language revitalization efforts (McKenzie, 2022). The production of indigenous language films, like the Haida language feature film "SGaawaay K'uuna," exemplifies innovative approaches to language revitalization, bringing hope to elders and engaging youth in cultural resurgence (Hurtubise, 2022). Collectively, these efforts underscore the importance of cultural sovereignty and intergenerational healing in the revitalization of indigenous oral histories.

6. Emerging Challenges & Tensions

The intergenerational transmission of narratives faces significant challenges, particularly the risk of narrative loss and the need to bridge generational divides. One primary risk is the fading of family memories into social silence and oblivion, as family narratives often offer unique perspectives that may contradict official accounts, yet they are vulnerable to being

overshadowed by dominant societal narratives (Rojas-Granada, 2024). This risk is compounded by the presence of unspoken events and memories, which can haunt subsequent generations, as seen in the transmission of trauma where silence and secrets can deeply affect descendants (Lijtmaer, 2017). To address these challenges, storytelling emerges as a crucial strategy. It serves as a means to process and communicate intergenerational trauma, offering a platform for marginalized voices and facilitating healing within families (Cardwell et al., 2023). Moreover, digital storytelling has been identified as an effective tool for fostering intergenerational dialogue and understanding. Programs like the Positive Ageing Digital Storytelling Intergenerational Program (PADSIP) have demonstrated the potential of digital storytelling to challenge stereotypes, foster deeper connections, and reshape attitudes across generations (Silver & Lee, 2023). Similarly, intergenerational digital storytelling initiatives have been shown to cultivate resilience by transmitting coping strategies and cultural wisdom, thereby strengthening intergenerational ties (Ansie & Mbamba, 2024). In the context of cultural and heritage transmission, storytelling, along with parental modeling and direct teaching, plays a vital role in imparting cultural family values and maintaining heritage languages, despite challenges such as lack of documentation and societal changes (Casanova, 2022; Sun, 2023). These strategies highlight the importance of creating opportunities for reflection and dialogue, which can bridge generational divides and ensure the preservation and transmission of valuable narratives across generations.

The scaling of storytelling on digital platforms presents a dual-edged scenario, offering significant opportunities for reach while posing risks of cultural dilution. Digital storytelling has revolutionized narrative forms, allowing for democratization and diversification of voices, which can empower new storytellers and foster empathy across global audiences (Lakshmi, 2025). However, as digital platforms facilitate the widespread dissemination of stories, there is a risk of cultural dilution, where the unique aspects of local narratives may be overshadowed by dominant cultural narratives, particularly from Western countries, thus intensifying global cultural imbalances (Jin, 2017). The tension between accessibility and specificity is evident in the use of digital media, where platforms like social media enable the creation of micro-narratives that are easily consumable and shareable, yet may lack the depth and specificity of traditional storytelling (Gayathri & Kumar, 2024).

This shift towards brevity and visual appeal can dilute the richness of cultural narratives, as seen in the promotion of cultural heritage sites like Beijing's Central Axis, where digital marketing strategies must balance broad outreach with maintaining cultural integrity (Sun, 2025). Furthermore, the participatory nature of digital storytelling, which allows audiences to engage and shape narratives, can lead to a loss of narrative authority and specificity, as stories become more generalized to appeal to a wider audience (Zafar et al., 2024). Despite these challenges, digital storytelling offers innovative opportunities for preserving intangible cultural heritage by engaging younger generations and diaspora communities, thus ensuring cultural continuity (Bajrami, 2023). The integration of digital storytelling into cultural preservation strategies, as seen in Serbia, highlights the potential for digital platforms to serve as tools for both broadening reach and maintaining cultural specificity, provided that culturally sensitive approaches are employed (Bajrami, 2023). Ultimately, while digital platforms offer unprecedented opportunities for storytelling reach, they necessitate careful navigation to mitigate the risks of cultural dilution and to balance accessibility with the preservation of narrative specificity.

Ethical considerations in storytelling, particularly in contexts such as healthcare and narrative research, revolve around issues of consent, narrative ownership, and safeguarding sensitive stories. Consent is a critical component, especially in digital storytelling within healthcare, where the dissemination of patient stories via the internet poses new ethical challenges. The

Patient Voices program exemplifies a respectful process that empowers storytellers by allowing them to make informed decisions about consent and dissemination, thus balancing their safety with their desire for their stories to be heard (Hardy, 2015). Narrative ownership is another significant ethical concern, as traditional research ethics often inadequately address the complexities of narrative research. This inadequacy stems from viewing participants merely as data sources rather than as co-creators of narratives, which necessitates a shift towards recognizing the multiplicity of narrative meanings and ensuring participants' ownership of their stories (Smythe & Murray, 2000). In healthcare, the ethical practice of narrative medicine involves clinicians engaging in dialogue with patients to understand their subjective experiences, thus fostering ethical patient care without compromising objectivity (Murphy & Franz, 2019).

Furthermore, the ethical dimensions of storytelling extend to mixed reality technologies, where designers must navigate responsibilities to both place and person, ensuring respect for cultural norms and obtaining wide consent to prevent harm (Millard et al., 2019). The interdisciplinary nature of narrative ethics highlights the power and risks of storytelling, as narratives can shape moral sensibilities but also potentially mislead or harm if not handled ethically (Lothe, 2017). Overall, ethical storytelling requires a nuanced approach that respects the autonomy and dignity of those whose stories are told, ensuring that narratives are shared responsibly and with the consent of all involved parties.

7. Implications for Practice and Research

For practitioners aiming to design safe, culturally resonant storytelling spaces and integrate trauma-informed and liberation-centered facilitation methods, several key considerations emerge from the literature. First, creating culturally resonant storytelling spaces involves understanding and incorporating the cultural practices and narratives of the communities involved. This is exemplified by the Indigenous storytelling practices discussed by Geia et al. (2013), which emphasize the importance of cultural context and the transmission of knowledge through storytelling as a means of preserving cultural identity and history. Similarly, Marshall's depiction of storytelling in the Caribbean highlights how cultural memory and oral history can serve as tools for resistance and community cohesion (Shamail, 2025). Practitioners should also consider trauma-informed approaches, which prioritize safe, inclusive, and anti-oppressive methods that are sensitive to the needs of individuals who have experienced trauma (Young et al., 2022).

This involves creating environments where participants feel safe to share their stories without fear of re-traumatization, as emphasized in the Narrative Shelter Model for young people with experiences of intimate partner violence (Nyirinkwaya & Jenney, 2024). Additionally, storytelling can be a powerful tool in therapeutic settings, such as in traumatic brain injury rehabilitation, where it aids in identity reconstruction and emotional processing (Candlish et al., 2022). The integration of storytelling into practice also requires facilitators to be trained in culturally competent and trauma-informed methods, as demonstrated by the development of a trauma curriculum for child welfare practitioners post-9/11 (Berger & Joyce, 2010). Overall, practitioners should aim to create storytelling spaces that are not only culturally resonant and trauma-informed but also empower participants to share their narratives in ways that promote healing and resilience.

For researchers interested in narrative interventions, there is a pressing need for intersectional and longitudinal evaluations to fully understand the complexities of narrative change over time. Intersectionality, as discussed by Johnson and Darrow (2023), provides a framework for exploring how various social identities intersect and influence narrative identity development,

suggesting that researchers should consider these dimensions when designing narrative studies. Longitudinal approaches allow researchers to capture the fluidity and evolution of narratives, acknowledging both chronological and interpretative aspects of time (McKibben & Breheny, 2023). This is crucial because narratives, like the individuals who tell them, are not static but continuously evolving, as emphasized by Penwarden (2024), who advocated for viewing participants as unfinalized across time. Methodological innovations are necessary to capture these changes effectively.

McLean (2024) pointed out the challenges in studying narrative change, noting the lack of evidence for profound and sustained change, which calls for new methods to track narrative evolution over time. Rooney et al. (2016) suggested that storytelling as a methodology can uncover deep-seated consumer behaviors and motivations, offering insights into how narratives are constructed and reconstructed over time. Furthermore, Spencer and Petersen (2020) highlighted the potential of narrative interventions in educational settings, where storytelling can enhance language skills and social interactions, indicating the need for robust evaluation methods to assess these interventions' long-term impacts. Finally, Reid and West (2014) emphasized the importance of personal narratives in various disciplines, suggesting that narrative research can benefit from a transdisciplinary approach to better understand the role of narratives in personal and social contexts. Collectively, these insights underscore the importance of developing innovative methodologies that can capture the dynamic nature of narratives, considering both intersectional and longitudinal dimensions to enhance the effectiveness and understanding of narrative interventions.

Embedding collective storytelling in truth and reconciliation processes holds significant implications for both practice and research, particularly in the realms of policy and advocacy. Storytelling serves as a powerful tool for conveying complex human experiences and emotions, which can be pivotal in truth and reconciliation efforts. The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) exemplifies how narrative frameworks can assess the successes and failures of reconciliation efforts, highlighting the importance of stories in understanding and addressing past injustices and fostering societal healing (Klaasen, 2020). Moreover, storytelling in TRCs provides opportunities for dialogue within transitional communities, enabling societies to confront past human rights violations and facilitating a more inclusive reconciliation process (Mollica, 2023).

However, the participation of marginalized groups, such as children, in these processes often remains inconsistent, underscoring the need for more inclusive storytelling practices that engage all community members substantively (Mollica, 2023). In the broader context of policy advocacy, storytelling is recognized as a means to translate evidence into policy by appealing to the emotions and psychology of policymakers, as seen in the grey literature on political advocacy (Davidson, 2017). This approach is also evident in liberal religious advocacy, where storytelling helps convey policy-relevant information without relying on potentially alienating religious language, thus bridging communication gaps across diverse audiences (Braunstein, 2012). Furthermore, digital storytelling has emerged as a vital tool in treaty education and reconciliation efforts, particularly in Canada, where it aids in understanding historical treaties and fostering reconciliation with Indigenous peoples (Hildebrandt et al., 2016). This digital approach not only enhances historical understanding but also promotes cross-sector awareness and engagement on social justice issues (Solomon, 2022). Collectively, these insights underscore the transformative potential of storytelling in truth and reconciliation processes, advocating for its strategic integration to foster empathy, understanding, and policy change across diverse contexts.

8. Conclusion

This study has traced the transformative arc from internalized voicelessness to the emergence of empowered collective voice within BIPOC communities. Across diverse contexts, the findings illuminate how shared narrative spaces—story circles, oral histories, artistic interventions, and digital platforms—become catalysts for emotional resonance, identity reclamation, and solidarity. These processes do more than affirm personal healing; they reconfigure collective agency, enabling communities to resist systemic silencing and articulate futures grounded in dignity and justice.

Conceptually, this research advances the framework of *voices that echo* as a scaffold for designing decolonial narrative interventions. By integrating insights from critical race theory, liberation psychology, and decolonial methodologies, the framework positions storytelling not as mere representation but as praxis—a means of unsettling dominant narratives while affirming marginalized knowledges. This research highlights the power of collective storytelling to both anchor cultural sovereignty and open pathways for systemic transformation.

Finally, this work issues a call to action: to prioritize collective storytelling as both healing praxis and instrument of change. Practitioners, researchers, and policymakers alike must recognize storytelling not as peripheral but as central to liberation work—whether in designing trauma-informed spaces, shaping truth and reconciliation processes, or embedding narrative justice into institutional practices. Amplifying voices that echo across generations and geographies honors the resilience of silenced communities and co-creates the conditions for a more just, plural, and inclusive future.

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