Words Flying Through the Air': Tribal Radio as a Health Information Resource for Rural American Indian Reservation Residents

Wilbricht, Jana

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Research Questions

Research Question 1: How does tribal radio aim to improve the health of American Indians/Alaska Natives?
Research Question 2: What are the barriers and facilitators of tribal radio as a health information resource for reservation residents?
Research Question 3: What communicative strategies are used on tribal radio to inform about health?
Research Question 4: What does the audience learn about health from tribal radio?

Method

- **Individual Interviews** (Station managers, full-time staff members, volunteers, radio show hosts involved with health-related programming)
- **Focus Groups** (8-10 participants per group who are tribal members over the age of 18 and regular listeners of their local tribal radio station)
- **Survey** (Sent to all 67 tribal radio stations in the U.S., either online or via postal service, asking about their mission statements, sources of funding, staff, reach, types of health-related programming, etc.)
- **Content Analysis** (Of any health-related content KUYI and KYUK are willing to share; content will be analyzed in terms of health issues addressed, structure (call-in show, interview, etc.) and communicative strategy (fear appeals, call to action, use of narratives, etc.)

Community Partners

- **KUYI** (Keams Canyon, Arizona) — on-air since 2000, serving entire Hopi Reservation
- **KYUK** (Bethel, Alaska) — The first radio station entirely owned and operated by a U.S. Native Tribe (on-air since 1971); serving about 22,000 predominantly Yup’ik individuals in Southwestern Alaska

Project Outcomes

- The project is part of my dissertation research
- Publication and conference presentations
- Interviews with station managers will inform questions for the focus groups that the radio stations feel would be most helpful for them to learn about from their audience. All data will be shared with the community partners.
- I will host health communication workshops at each radio station, sharing best practices grounded in Communication and Public Health theories and models
- Creation of a National Tribal Radio website (in collaboration with Native Public Media)
- Support of community partners’ travel to professional conferences, such as the National Native Media Conference to network and present our findings

Challenges & Lessons Learned

A challenge the project faces is the very limited prior work that exists on U.S. tribal radio in general, and the lack of scholarly work addressing tribal radio as a health information resource. This is also a unique opportunity for the project to make a contribution to the field of Media Studies, but also to Native American Studies and Public Health. The library staff, particularly Judy Smith, has been instrumental in identifying sources for both the academic and the applied aspects of the project. I will work with library staff to create the National Tribal Radio website. I also learned a great deal about community-based participatory research, as the project is conducted in close partnership with the radio stations and their tribal communities. The project will not only be approved by the UM IRB, but also by the respective tribal review boards in AZ and AK.

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