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TITLE: The ethical complexities of sponsored digital storytelling initiatives

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Abstract

This article articulates key ethical issues that may arise in sponsored digital storytelling initiatives, projects wherein participants' stories are used to promote the organization that subsidized their training. Analyzing a digital story from a public health project in the US, the article suggests that sponsored digital storytelling initiatives require participants, facilitators, and those within sponsoring organizations to make complicated ethical judgments about recruiting storytellers, the role of storytellers in the production process, and if and how to represent proximate others in stories. Critical concepts from life writing and documentary studies are used to explore these issues.

Keywords

digital storytelling, ethics, new media, documentary, life writing

Introduction

Digital storytelling, a facilitated, workshop-based process in which ordinary people assemble short videos from a recorded personal narrative and self-sourced photos, is a relatively new practice that is rapidly spreading 'around the world' (Hartley and McWilliam, 2009). With the diffusion of digital storytelling, enthusiasm for its potential to democratize storytelling has been joined by more measured and occasionally wary assessments. One obvious, but important point has emerged in the critical conversation: digital storytelling is not simply a neutral, transferrable process – a series of steps that leads to a completed story and standard outcomes – but rather it is an *embedded* practice, one that happens within institutions and is mediated by institutional values and discourses (McWilliam,

2008; Thumim, 2009). The institutions in which digital story production takes place are variously involved: some simply provide the invitation to tell one's story and the space and facilitators to assist; other institutions deploy digital storytelling through a relationship more properly labeled as sponsorship, wherein a participant's training is subsidized in exchange for the institution having the right to use the completed story to promote its work or services.¹ Such sponsored arrangements, I argue in this article, are ethically complex, and can present morally unclear moments to storytellers, facilitators, and sponsors.

My analytical focus is on a story produced in a public health project in the US called Peer-to-Peer (P2P).² The P2P project was funded by a multi-year grant, conceived of by a team of public health faculty and public health officials, and deployed by professional media consultants, of whom I was one.³ The project's aim was to gather digital stories from parents in a support program serving at-risk families (Family Services), and to use these stories for peer-to-peer and provider education. A first round of stories was produced by seven Family Services staff members in a digital storytelling train-the-trainer workshop. After the training workshop, these staff worked one-on-one with individual clients to produce additional stories.

To identify and explore the ethical complexity of sponsored digital storytelling initiatives, I turn to the critical literature of life writing and documentary studies. These two theoretical traditions, engaged as they are with the practice of capturing lives in stories and images, contain a rich store of critical concepts relevant to digital storytelling. However with the notable exception of Poletti (2011), the critical literature of digital storytelling has drawn little on these fields. My analysis centers on three concepts. First, from life writing, I

introduce the concept of vulnerable subjects (Couser, 2004). With sponsored digital storytelling initiatives, storytellers are often enlisted to participate in workshops at the request of someone else, such as an employer or a representative of an organization that provides them with services. Focusing on the potential vulnerability of these subjects, based on their organizational entanglements, highlights important ethical questions. Next, from documentary studies, I use the concept of moral and psychological accountability (Coles, 1997). Documentarians have used this concept as a guiding principle in their relationships with their 'subjects' (a problematic term, as I will discuss), and the concept may likewise usefully direct those who work with digital storytellers in sponsored initiatives. I close with a discussion of the relational self and proximate others, corollary concepts from autobiographical theory that situate the self as always defined in relation to other people (Eakin, 1999; Mason, 1980; Miller, 1994). Although *any* digital story likely involves the representation of people besides the storyteller, in sponsored initiatives, those who create stories often showcase others' stories – for example, a teacher may tell the story of a student, a social worker the story of a client. Digital stories that retell others' stories in this way raise particular ethical questions.

Digital storytelling: its founding framings and subsequent critical assessment

Until recently, the majority of digital storytelling production in the US and worldwide was in some way linked to the Center for Digital Storytelling (the CDS), in Berkeley, CA. The CDS and its founder, Joe Lambert, set the stage for critical and ethical framing of digital storytelling in Lambert's *Digital Storytelling: Capturing Lives, Creating Community*, in which digital storytelling is described as a way to slow down, to share stories, and to 'make artifact[s] out of transformative narratives' (Lambert, 2009a). Digital

storytelling is also framed by Lambert as a community-based and community-building movement, with the potential to incite change beyond the level of the individual.

Overall, if we assess the CDS framing of digital storytelling by the classic ethical imperative to minimize harm and to maximize good, the practice as portrayed in Lambert's book seems to be ethically positive. Indeed, other convincing arguments have been made in the digital storytelling literature about its benefits, including that digital storytelling is a source of personal agency and personal development (Davis, 2005; Lundby, 2008; ML Katz and Hull, 2006), a promising pedagogical method (Benmayor, 2008; Hull and Nelson, 2005; Kearney, 2011; McLellan, 2007), and a way to enable the creativity of 'ordinary people' (Burgess, 2006; Meadows, 2003).

There is, however, some suggestion in Lambert's book that harm can result from the digital storytelling process. The interviews with Amy Hill of Silence Speaks and Pip Hardy and Tony Sumner of Patient Voices, both of which appear in the 'conversations' that conclude Lambert's book, describe adjustments that these organizations have made to the digital storytelling process to protect workshop participants, which include a multiple-stage consent process and in-workshop psychological counseling. These adjustments suggest that digital storytelling initiatives with certain participants can, if run without attention to the needs of these participants, leave them worse off than they started. Perhaps just as important as the warnings that harm can come from the digital storytelling process is the collective point made by these conversations that digital storytelling is a contextually embedded practice. In different settings, with different populations of participants, the practice and genre can take on different forms. Its potential for good is not always, or always easily, achieved.

This implicit claim for digital storytelling as contextually embedded and determined – that is, not inherently good (or bad), but rather defined in relation to the context in which it is deployed – is developed in two edited collections devoted to digital storytelling. In Lundby's (2008) *Digital Storytelling, Mediatized Stories*, a range of complications and critiques are directed at claims for digital storytelling as transforming and transformative. McWilliam, for example, suggests that digital storytelling practice can support a range of ideologies and subject positions, and that digital stories must, 'be understood as the product of a discursive engagement with their producing institution' (2008: 155). Thumim (2008) identifies 'processes of cultural mediation' as constituted among tensions about how institutions and participants frame storytelling initiatives. Kaare and Lundby refine the CDS notion of digital stories as authentic by clarifying that while there is great potential for authenticity, it is a feat that must be achieved in a workshop, not a given (2008: 120). Some of the same voices and concerns appear in Hartley and McWilliam's (2009) edited collection, *Story Circle: Digital Storytelling Around the World*. Notably, Lambert himself expresses some frustration that the spread of digital storytelling outside of a social change framework has 'stretched the concept and values of our work to a thin, superficial veneer' (2009b: 82). Additionally, Taub-Pervizpour (2009), who leads workshops with marginalized youth, suggests that the workshop facilitators and co-participants who witness digital stories may have an ethical responsibility to respond to the injustices raised in these stories.

The recent work of Poletti (2011) and Thumin (2009) are most salient to my discussion. Poletti invokes a concept from theorists of autobiography to frame her analysis of digital storytelling, using Smith and Watson's (2010) idea of 'coaxed' life narratives to

discuss how the CDS philosophy 'coaxes,' a particular kind of story from workshop participants. The stories thus coaxed, Poletti then argues, may not be so effective as tools for structural change. Tumim studies two storytelling initiatives deployed in the context of public cultural institutions in the UK (one is not CDS-style digital storytelling), arguing that the self-representations possible in each initiative are framed by the approach of the sponsoring institution. Together, these two arguments complicate the founding and persistent narrative of the CDS, suggesting that while the prototypical method of the CDS frames a set of possibilities for digital storytelling, a sponsoring institution may further alter these possibilities.

Although the survey above shows a developing sense of the actual possibilities of digital storytelling, I suggest that we should move *outside* of the literature strictly about digital storytelling for the task of scrutinizing the ethical complexity of digital storytelling in sponsored initiatives. I recommend this for two reasons. First, none of this literature necessarily assists practitioners with defining and abiding by ethical practice: that is, while the recent literature on digital storytelling surely better delimits the possibilities and constraining factors around digital storytelling in institutional settings, it does not necessarily help storytellers, facilitators, or sponsoring institutions to identify and systematically think through morally complex situations that may arise in specific digital storytelling initiatives.

Second, rather than reinvent the proverbial wheel, we might follow Poletti's lead and turn to fields that have long grappled with the challenges of ethical representation of the self and others. Documentary studies, one of the two traditions on which I draw, has had much to say about both the representation of the self and others in the documentary

tradition (Corner, 1996; Nichols, 1992; Renov, 2004; Rosenthal and Corner, 2005; Waldman and Walker, 1999), and the particular ethical challenges that accompany the documentary process (Coles, 1997; Pryluck, 2005; Ruby, 2005; Winston, 2005). Similarly, the critical literature about life writing and autobiography is rich with language that usefully describes the challenges of representing the self and others in written accounts (Couser, 2004; Mason, 1980; Smith and Watson, 1998; Stanton, 1991).

Mary's story: A discussion of ethical issues in the P2P project

The P2P project was a multiple-year, grant-funded project designed to bring the wisdom of parents into a program called Family Services. Operating out of early-intervention centers in one US state, Family Services is a network of eight home-visiting programs, all located in communities with high rates of infant death and disease. Social workers and nurses are sent into the homes of new parents, where they perform assessments to link families with appropriate services, as well as provide counseling and education about issues such as maternal depression, parent-child bonding, nutrition, and domestic violence.

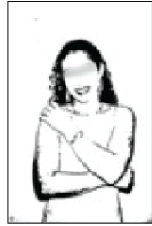
The P2P project had two major components: one was the design of print 'emotion-based messaging' materials designed around themes identified by parents in a series of focus groups; the other was the production of digital stories by providers and parents. Family Services staff attended a digital storytelling train-the-trainer workshop during their work hours, many of them creating personal stories about work they had done with clients in the program. Each newly trained staff member was then tasked to produce two additional stories during the subsequent year, working with parents that were currently or had formerly been their clients in the Family Services program. Also as part of the grant,

each of the two participating sites received a set of hardware and software for producing digital stories, funding to pay the Family Services staff an hourly rate for their work on the stories, and follow-up technical assistance on an as-needed basis.

The story presented in Figure 1 was produced in the staff train-the-trainer workshop. The story was written and edited by Mary, a nurse at The Center, one of the two Family Services programs participating in the P2P project; it documents Mary's discovery of the complexity of birth control by telling the story of one of her clients, Luisa. The figure includes the photographs (digitally de-identified) and text of the first paragraph of the story. Mary worked with Luisa prior to the training to confirm details of Luisa's story and to collect the photos that would illustrate the story. Luisa had signed a consent form before the project began, which indicated her informed consent to participate and to release her story for use in clinical settings and online display.



a) Luisa called to tell me a girl had arrived.



b) I understood her to mean her sister had come from Brazil. 'No,' she said.



c) 'I had a baby girl.'



d) I was surprised. I congratulated her, but in the back of my mind, I was worried.



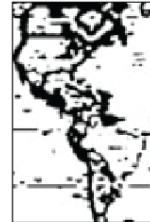
e) She had graduated from our Family Services Program at The Center 10 months earlier with her third child.



f) At that point, Luisa told me that she did not want more children.



g) Her life was already complicated enough.



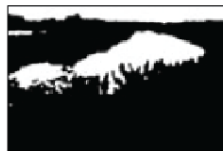
h) Four years earlier, Luisa traveled from Brazil



i) with her two young sons, to reunite with



j) her husband Davi.



k) She crossed the Rio Grande at night, clinging to an inner tube



l) and grasping her boys,



m) terrified by the sounds and smells in the churning water.



n) Once she got to America, she thought her troubles would be over, but they had just begun.



o) Her sons had difficulty adjusting to school,



p) her husband was drinking and could not keep a steady job.



q) Luisa was overwhelmed, depressed, and felt worthless.

Figure 1. Text and Images from first paragraph of Mary's story about Luisa

After the introduction shown in Figure 1, Mary's story continues on, describing more about Luisa, her family, and Luisa's relationship with Mary and The Center. The

second paragraph tells the story of Mary and Luisa's history as nurse and client of The Center; the third paragraph returns to the scene that opens the story, describing a subsequent conversation that Mary had with Luisa about why various birth control methods had failed for her and her husband, Davi. The story ends without full resolution of Luisa's story – she and Davi have still not figured out a reliable approach to family planning – and with Mary articulating the lesson she has taken from her work with Luisa: 'I never realized how emotionally and logistically complicated birth control could be. [...] Luisa taught me that if women are afraid of birth control, they will not use it.'

I will begin by simply listing all of the ethical questions that arose in the process of making and distributing the parent stories produced in the P2P project. The list reflects concerns articulated in interviews that I conducted with providers and parents, as well as those voiced in a meeting of a wider network of clinicians and administrators involved in Family Services:

1. Is it ethical for clinicians to approach clients about telling their story? Do the clients feel obliged to say yes because they have received services or because they trust their clinicians?
2. Is it ethical to ask for consent only once, and especially at the outset of the project, when the story is as yet undefined?
3. Does the storyteller (or, in some cases, the story's subject) need full control of the process (i.e., writing the story, revising the story, selecting the photographs, editing the video, selecting the music)? Is there danger of appropriating someone else's story if they are not given control at all moments?

4. Is it the ethical responsibility of the sponsoring organization to provide counseling services for the psychological issues that the digital storytelling process may surface (e.g., depression, family tensions)?
5. Is it the ethical responsibility of the sponsoring organization to provide psychological support for those who *watch* the stories?
6. Is it ethical to tell someone else's very personal story, as Mary has done?
7. Is it ethical to include, without obtaining consent, images of others captured in one's personal photographs?
8. Is it ethical to use photographs of children?
9. Is it ethical to put these stories online, where they might be used for unknown purposes?
10. Is it ethical to decide for someone that their personal story has too many ethical risks to be shared?

These questions all caused varying degrees of moral and psychological anxiety for the Family Services staff as they produced stories with and about their clients; the questions also troubled the project directors and facilitators. In the sections that follow, I will describe how the three key concepts I have posed – vulnerable subjects, moral and psychological accountability, and the relational self – may help clarify potential ethical complexities in sponsored digital storytelling initiatives like P2P.

Vulnerable subjects and informed consent

I work here with Couser's (2004) broader concept of the 'vulnerable' as those who are in 'fiduciary' relationships with those who wish to tell their story. A fiduciary

relationship is characterized by 'partners whose preexisting characteristics or conditions put them in dependent positions to begin with' (2004: 17). Examples of such relationships include those between family members, provider and client, and employer and employee. Although fiduciary relationships are often perfectly healthy, their dynamics can nevertheless make it difficult to ensure truly informed consent. Katz and Katz (1988), writing about autobiographical documentaries – documentary films made about a filmmaker's own life and family – coin the helpful phrase 'intimate consent,' where the close, preexisting relationship between filmmaker and filmed means that 'love, guilt, the fear of loss of love, a sense of favors owed, a desire to help, and a desire to be helpful add to the usual confusion of motives which contributes to consent among strangers' (1988: 124).

These complex entanglements and confused motives can certainly be present in sponsored digital storytelling projects like P2P, where employees feel obligated to their supervisors and employer, and clients to the organization. Katz and Katz suggest that these entanglements can make it difficult for a subject to give genuinely *voluntary* consent. They furthermore remind us that *informed* consent may be difficult to achieve in such situations, as the subject's desire to cooperate can lead him or her to consent without sufficient inquiry into the specific aims of the project.

For the P2P project, a key question is whether it was possible to attain truly voluntary consent from the Family Services parents to participate. The typical way of recruiting parent storytellers was to first brainstorm clients that had good stories and might be interested in telling them, and then to send clinical staff to make a home visit. At the visit, the clinician described the digital storytelling process, showed a sample digital story or two, and answered the parent or parents' questions. All staff members involved in

the P2P project were clearly sensitive about not approaching clients who they thought might be harmed by the storytelling process or by sharing their stories, and not pressuring clients who seemed ambivalent about or unwilling to participate after being approached. Indeed, much effort was put into recruiting storytellers who later backed out of the project.

However, the concept of vulnerable subjects requires asking the question of whether even the most sensitive approach might be insufficient: the preexisting relationship between the Family Services staff and their clients may have made it more difficult for the clients to give truly voluntary consent. Mary, for example, had worked with Luisa and her family for three years at the point of the story's writing – and this relationship was emotionally intimate, built as it was around Mary's visits to Luisa's house as a nurse and confidant. It is possible that the parents, who were in a fiduciary relationship with both the clinicians approaching them and the Family Services institution, may have felt obliged to tell their stories. This sense of obligation could be felt as a need to 'pay back' Mary for her help over the years. The family also trusted Mary, and likely felt that she had their best interests in mind.

In any situation where a staff member or client is asked if they will speak on behalf of an organization, by someone with whom they have a fiduciary relationship, there may be an ethical problem. Service recipients may feel that they owe an organization their participation. Similarly, in workplace-based digital storytelling initiatives, employees may feel obliged to both participate and to speak in ways that shine a favorable light on their employer.

Moral and psychological accountability

In *Doing Documentary Work*, Robert Coles elaborates the concept of moral and psychological accountability in documentary work:

... what are our responsibilities to those with whom we come to spend our time, to whom we pose questions, or whom we ask to pose while we go click, click, click, or our videocameras roll on and on? How ought we regard ourselves, with what degree of scrutiny our motives and our manner, of why we go where we do, and how we behave while there? Afterwards, what if anything, ought we keep in mind? Should we keep in touch with those whom we have enlisted as informants, as participants in our project? Put differently, what kind of moral and psychological accountability should we demand of ourselves [?] (1997: 74).

As Coles suggests, accountability in documentary plays out in how a documentarian interacts with the subjects of her work, how she responds to what she learns from these subjects, and how she relates to the subjects after the project is over. Although feminist critics have warned of the power imbalances implied by the 'filmmaker/subject dyad' (Waldman and Walker 1999: 16), an attitude of moral and psychological accountability has resulted in more ethical practices in documentary filmmaking, including more careful protocols for participant consent, protection of footage from recirculation, and collaborative practices like the filmmaker's sharing control over the rough or fine cut with her subjects (Aufderheide et al., 2009: 11). Indeed, negotiating the terms of participation has been defined by documentary theorists as one of the most promising ways to nurture a more ethical process (Pryluck, 2005; Winston, 2005).

The concept of moral and psychological accountability offers a guiding principle that can remind those who commission and facilitate sponsored digital storytelling projects like P2P that they are accountable to those who tell their stories. The notion of moral and psychological accountability I intend as distinct from institutional *requirements* such as signed, lawyer-vetted consent forms. As both Amy Hill and the Pip Hardy and Tony Sumner team explain in their conversations with Joe Lambert, when one sees oneself as morally accountable to storytellers in a project, it may be necessary to adjust the consent process by asking for consent at multiple stages of the project. This did indeed happen in the P2P project: the parents signed an initial consent form giving Family Services permission to use their story; however, after seeing the completed stories, which were quite personally revealing, the project staff thought it necessary to re-approach several parents to verify their consent.

Another key aspect of the digital storytelling process that can be explored with the concept of moral and psychological accountability is that of creative control during the production process. While it is fundamental in the CDS' definition of digital storytelling that a storyteller is in control of her story from start to finish, this did not seem logistically feasible in the P2P project. It was impossible to gather all of the busy parents together for three or four days to participate in a full, CDS-style digital storytelling workshop, and the P2P project staff decided from the start that a modified production process would be necessary. Of the four stories produced about parents by Mary and two of her colleagues at The Center, the general trend was that creative control rested largely with the Family Services staff, rather than with the parents featured in the stories. All of the parents were involved, to varying degrees, in drafting the story scripts. Some parents wrote the script

entirely themselves, some collaborated with a Family Services staff member. All of the parents provided the photos for their stories. However, after providing the raw materials, the parents had little involvement in the construction of the videos. They did not participate in a Story Circle, nor did they contribute to the editing of the videos. Indeed, one of Mary's comments at the completion of the project was that she wished the parents could have been more involved in the production of their own stories.

If having storytellers produce their stories in a facilitated workshop is logistically impossible, or if the storytellers do not care to learn how to edit videos, the orientation of accountability suggests the sponsoring organization should work to design other opportunities for the storytellers to exert some form of creative control. Hill (2008), for example, describes this dynamic in a project her organization did with women in Uganda. The women wrote and took photographs for their stories, but workshop facilitators edited the videos. In a kind of compensation for the agency lost in not editing their own videos, the workshop facilitators added opportunities for participants to develop 'multiple iterations of [their stories] and multiple opportunities for feedback, discussion, and validation' (2008: 56).

In sponsored digital storytelling initiatives, the logic of institutional efficiency and expedience can make it difficult to involve storytellers throughout the process. The notion of moral and psychological accountability should forefront the need to consider how some of the core values of CDS-style digital storytelling, such as meaningful personal reflection and the group sharing of stories, might be maintained in such a context.

The relational self and proximate others

In the 1980s, feminist theorists of autobiography, in step with pervasive critiques of the autonomous, modernist self, articulated the concept of the relational self (Mason, 1980; Smith and Watson, 1998; Stanton, 1991). Where the modernist self was unified and self-contained, the relational self is social: both defined in relation to others and capable of knowing itself only by exploring its relationships to others. Theorists of autobiography have used the concept primarily to expand the canon of autobiography to include memoirs that explore the self as part of a larger narrative of family or community.

Eakin, in a discussion of the ethics of representing 'proximate others,' suggests that exploration of identity and ethical concerns about privacy are nearly inseparable: 'It is difficult not only to determine the boundaries of the other's privacy but indeed to delimit the very otherness of the other's identity' (1999: 176). In other words, it's quite difficult to tell a personal story – certainly a complex and compelling one – without situating oneself among other people, and negotiating the representation of these proximate others can cause a storyteller moral or psychological anxiety.

Mary's story, which might more aptly be called Luisa's story, is an example of how the relational self becomes obvious in sponsored digital storytelling initiatives. Given the prompt to tell a personal story that explored her work in Family Services, Mary naturally told a story about her work with a client. In sponsored digital storytelling initiatives where staff are asked to tell meaningful personal stories about their work, it is near impossible to imagine how others at the organization – clients or co-workers – will not play an important role in the stories.

In addition, Luisa's life is also relational; her self is defined in relationship to her husband and children. Practically speaking, the written and visual disclosure necessary to render the story of Luisa and her family raises a number of ethical questions about privacy and permission. Although Mary received permission from Luisa to tell the story, and although her husband Davi and her children saw – and liked – the final product, it is not hard to imagine how such disclosure could be received as an invasion of privacy.

The P2P staff decided, before distributing Mary's story, to cut a short passage from the recorded narration that they worried might compromise Luisa's husband, Davi. The passage that was cut is preceded by a description of a number of reasons why birth control did not work for Luisa and her husband, involving fear and hesitancy on the part of both spouses. The line that was cut reads as so: 'Davi had planned to have a vasectomy after Angelo, their third child was born, but Luisa said he didn't make the appointment.' The decision to cut this line removed one ethical problem – the problematic representation of Davi – but it added another ethical problem: the family's situation was no longer represented fully accurately. This change indicates the complexity of telling the story of a relational self: although only one line was cut, removing Davi's involvement in the family's story alters the truth. Family planning, which had been defined as a shared responsibility of Luisa and Davi, now becomes Luisa's responsibility alone: the details that remain show her fear of the long-term effects of birth control pills, her discomfort with an IUD, and her difficulty arranging childcare so that she might have tubal ligation surgery. If we consider the storyteller's ethical responsibility to convey a truth to her audience, such modification of a story's original details is problematic.

These ethical problems are heightened in a visual medium like video. For example, in selecting the photo in Panel p of Figure 1, Mary made an artistically appropriate decision. Luisa's husband Davi is shown with a cast on his foot, shirtless and bleary eyed, in a room where the curtains seem shut against the daylight. When viewed alongside the voiceover below the photo, which describes Davi's drinking and his failure to follow through and make a vasectomy appointment, the photograph communicates what seems to be an accurate, though not a very flattering representation of Davi during that time. The P2P staff in fact removed this photo before the story was posted online.

In P2P, a project with the aim to collect parents' stories, the most commonly featured proximate others were children. Every story featured photographs of the storyteller's children. These photographs, as Burgess (2006: 9) says of the recorded voice in digital stories, contributed both to the stories' feeling of authenticity and to their emotional impact. The photographs in Panels f, i, l, and n of Figure 1, for example, which portray children that appear to be healthy and well adjusted, also likely develop the viewer's sense that despite the problems in their lives, Luisa and Davi are good, loving parents. But there is no way around the fact that the children are too young to give informed consent to their representation. While some digital stories available online blur the faces of children in photographs (including some, but not all of the stories on the CDS website), there are no widely understood guidelines for when and how it is appropriate to represent children. As theorists of life writing and documentary filmmaking have suggested, their portrayal is problematic (Couser, 2004; Pryluck, 2005). Couser (2004), who deals with the subject of children extensively in *Vulnerable Subjects: The Ethics of Life Writing*, notes that 'What are intended by parents as beneficent acts may be perceived by their

children, once grown, as violations of their autonomy, acts of appropriation or even betrayal' (2004: 57). If we think of the potential of a story to spread online, or to be watched by a child later in life, it is not hard to imagine some children responding negatively to their parents' portrayal of them in digital stories.

Approaching the story writing and photo selection processes of digital storytelling with an understanding of the self not as autonomous, but rather as a relational entity, whose life is entangled with the good and bad actions of proximate others, may hamstring some digital storytellers, who will be anxious to say anything about other people. But introducing the concept will ensure that they have given thought to the ethics of their portrayal of others. It can also remind those who are planning sponsored projects like P2P to consider the likely proximate others that will be represented in stories, and to consider establishing guidelines for project participants about the representation of other people.

Conclusion

Some of the dangers that accompany sponsored digital storytelling initiatives raised in my discussion of Mary's story are extreme – such as psychological injury to storytellers or story subjects, or lawsuits against sponsoring institutions by those who object to their portrayal in digital stories. But more pervasive is likely what Coles calls 'moral jitters' (1997: 85), a feeling among digital storytellers, facilitators, and sponsors that the potential for harm exists and that they are not entirely equipped to think their way through these problems.

Speaking as an instructor who teaches university students digital storytelling, in part so that they might conceive of meaningful sponsored initiatives, what seems most necessary is that those who create, or teach others to create, or sponsor the creation of

digital stories be prepared to anticipate ethical challenges. These potential challenges need not be cause for abandoning sponsored initiatives – indeed, many of the parents in the P2P project, including Luisa, articulated pride in both their stories and in the potential of these stories to help other parents. However, sponsored initiatives should be carefully conceived of, designed, and deployed in light of these ethical challenges.

Notes

1. It is worth noting that some initiatives run by cultural institutions also require an exchange of sorts, requiring or at least requesting that workshop participants release their completed stories to the institution as a precondition of participation (e.g., Capture Wales). These 'looser' forms of sponsorship might broaden the range of what we would consider 'sponsored initiatives.'
2. P2P is a pseudonym, as are all individuals' and organizations' names in this article.
3. This article was written based on research gathered with approval of an academic IRB. The research was not conducted until after the author concluded her consulting relationship with P2P.

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