



DISCERNING MEANING... Achieving a Shared Understanding of What Data Means By Kristin Hill

Ok, now you have the data. You had been told that you needed to support your request with data. You collected data. You presented data. The funders/ decision makers saw the data and they heard the data. But what does it mean?

If you have arranged for the data to be analyzed (by our talented epidemiologists, for example) who will display the data in a report using narrative description, tables, graphs and an analysis, you will find that data has been broken down into its parts or elements. Webster's Dictionary¹ tells us that to **analyze** is to: study or determine the nature and relationship of the parts; separate or distinguish the component parts of something; or discover its true nature or inner relationships. The data analysis is a very important part of a report, but you aren't done yet.

The next step is to **discern** the meaning. Some people might blend analyze and discern into a single interpretation, but they are really two different mental exercises. *Continued Pg2*



New Epi-Center Program Assistant says, "boozhoo!!"

Hello & Boozhoo,

Recently hired on as The Epidemiology Center's new Program Assistant, I just wanted to say hey to everyone. Hey!

My given name is Joseph, but only my Ma and Grandma call me that, and it's usually followed by some sort of loud advice. Everyone else calls me Joey. I grew up in Michigan, went to school in Wisconsin, spent time in Minnesota, and ran around Colorado for awhile. Now I'm back in Wisconsin and loving it. I was a Badger, and I actually ended up graduating in 2003 with a BA in Political Theory. I would like to continue my education at some point; go back and try to get my Masters. *Continued Pg. 2*



Epidemiology is the study of the distribution and determinants of health-related states or events in specified populations and the application of this study to the control of health problems.

...New Program Asst. Cont.

I spent the last year volunteering as an Americorps VISTA in the LDF Tribal Planning Department. Luckily, I was able to get involved in a variety of community development projects and help out with the day to day operations over there. I love the slow paced, laidback lifestyle of the Northwoods. It's nice to be surrounded by nature. Besides cracking wise, I enjoy Curling, reading, writing



“A picture of Joey after he met his new coworkers”

and traveling. During our eight months of winter, I plan on giving hunting, cross country skiing and motorcycle mechanics a shot. I'm looking forward to serving the Native Communities of Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Michigan. I'm itching to get out and explore the different areas of our region, and spend time with all of you. I'm happy and thankful that I will be able to continue working in Indian Country. If I had to leave I'd miss the teasing too much.

Miigwetch,

Joey

...Discerning meaning cont.

Webster defines discern as: to separate, distinguish between; to detect with the eyes; to detect with senses other than vision; to recognize or identify as separate and distinct; to come to know or recognize mentally; to see or understand the difference; to show insight and understanding. When you discern the meaning, you are engaging in a deeper level of association that establishes context, culture, history, world view, heritage, tradition, experience, learning, personality, mind-set and more. It would be like the difference between a two dimensional image in a painting or a three dimensional image. In a two dimensional image, you are left to guess what the image looks like in space. A three dimensional image presents the image from all sides, evident to everyone. So, how do you facilitate a conversation that discerns meaning? First of all, don't stop with the analysis or, try to design interventions prematurely. Convene the people that could review the data and analysis, and then create the three dimensional image. They would be the people that know the history, culture, tradition and have experience. They are people that have been involved. They are people that are interested. They are people with an open mind. Here are some questions that will help you discern meaning:

- We have reviewed the data and analysis, what has become the most significant?
- Where have we seen a breakthrough?
- What has become clear?
- What does this mean to our efforts, our community, our vision?
- When have we been here before?
- What insights can we describe?
- Where does change need to occur?
- What needs to be connected?
- What leadership is needed?
- How does this relate to our strengths, limitations?
- What have become our possibilities?
- What have we come to understand?

...Discerning meaning cont.

Looking back on the title of this article, you will see the word *shared*, as in *shared* understanding. The above questions asked of the group you have assembled, if all people have been able to contribute their ideas safely and openly, will create the *shared* interpretation and the collective understanding. Establishing a shared understanding of meaning will provide a firm foundation of support and the combined energy to propel new programs forward.

Epidemiology, "the study of what is upon the people," is derived from the Greek terms *epi* = upon, among; *demos* = people, district; *logos* = study, word, discourse



Where in the world have the Epidemiologists been?

The American Public Health Association (APHA) Annual Meeting and Exposition...of course.

Two of our epidemiologists, Anne Trinh and Isaiah Brokenleg, attended the APHA annual meeting and exposition in San Diego, California recently. This was a great opportunity to learn about the latest research and promising practices, and to network with people who work in public health from all over the world, including those from Indian country. Isaiah also had the opportunity to present research at the conference on American Indian Adolescent Second Hand Smoke Exposure. There were special American Indian research sessions and other presentations relevant

to American Indian health throughout the conference. American Indian research areas included: diabetes, nutrition and obesity, and Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR). Other scientific sessions of interest included: alcohol and other drug addiction, health disparities, maternal and child health, tobacco use and abuse, culturally based interventions, and many other topics. Anne and Isaiah observed that many tribes are beginning to build their own research and epidemiology capacity, which is very promising. Most Tribal interventions that were showcased centered on tradition and cultural renewal, while focusing on the immediate needs of the population. Attending this conference brought a revived sense of tribal sovereignty and leadership. Looking into the future, we see freedom from the burdens of disease that have plagued our people for so long and hope to see more rep-



It's a Girl!!!

Maternal and Child Health receives a precious package;
5'6" Minnesota born Epidemiologist...Meghan Porter

Hi! I'm the newest epidemiologist here at the Great Lakes Epi Center. I graduated this spring from the University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Public Health with a Master of Public Health in Health Behavior. For my graduate internship, in addition to a day job in women's health education, I worked as a domestic violence advocate, and lived at a

women's shelter on a South Dakota reservation.

Even though I've spent time in the South, I was no stranger to the Midwest- I grew up near Minneapolis. I guess I had enough of seeing flowers in January, and decided to move back to where you can drive on lakes. Of course, I'm also happy to be closer to my family

again.

I'm looking forward to meeting people, learning more about the Native people in the Great Lakes area, and working with communities to support them as they work to reduce disparities and improve their people's health.

- Meghan



-Meghan in a red hoodie on a rainy day. Welcome to Wisconsin!

Her coworkers agree...

"She's quite precocious!"



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GLITEC's Mission:
" To support Tribal communities in their efforts to improve health by assisting with data needs through: Partnership Development, Community Based Research, Education, and Technical Assistance.

What? Understanding the meaning behind Epi-Speak

Terms of Epidemiology...

In the business of epidemiology, specifically that of quantitative research (research which is primarily concerned with objective, numerical data), many different tools are used to assess factors which are associated with health and disease within a specific population. Epidemiologists rely on scientifically tested instruments, such as surveys and questionnaires, to get information that can accurately and precisely measure important aspects of health and disease, such as smoking rates, levels of depression, body mass index, or high blood pressure. Below is a brief overview of **validity** and **reliability**, two characteristics of tools and instruments used by epidemiologists and other health professionals.

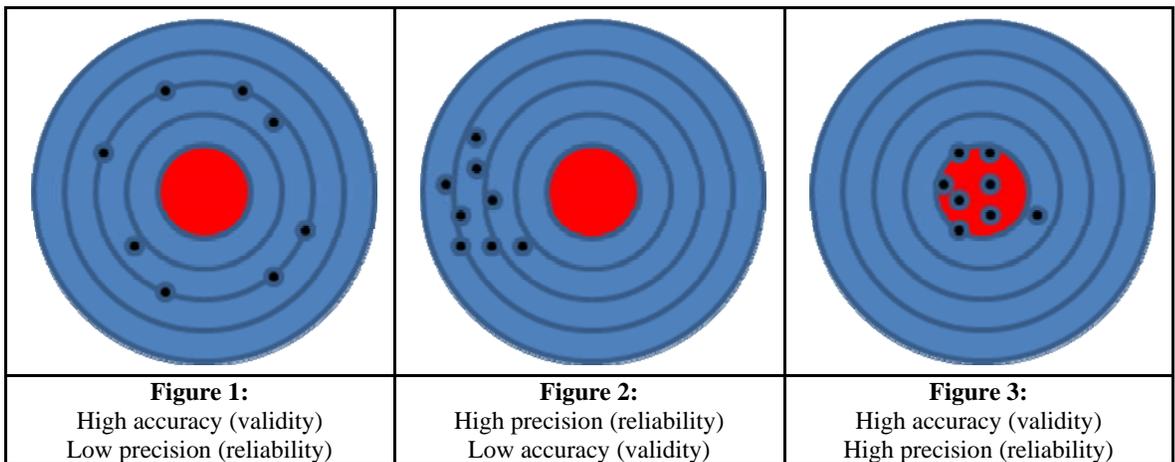
The **validity** of a tool or instrument is its ability to measure what it intends or claims to measure. Validity is related to accuracy, or how close a measured value is to a true value.

- Example 1: When playing darts, a valid and accurate throw will be very close to the bull's eye. This means that with successive throws, the darts will all be at a similar distance from the bull's eye. Please refer to Figure 1.
- Example 2: When studying smoking rates in a population, a valid and accurate tool will be able to identify the number of smokers in the research population.

The **reliability** of a tool or instrument is its ability to have reproducible results. Reliability is related to precision, or how results can be duplicated in different populations.

- Example 1: When playing darts, a reliable and precise throw may not be close to the bull's eye, but successive throws will all be close to each other. Please refer to Figure 2.
- Example 2: When studying smoking rates in a population, a reliable and precise tool will be to identify the number of smokers in a research population, *AND* in other populations. A reliable tool gives correct results no matter the circumstances.

As you may already know, health research tools and instruments need to be highly valid and highly reliable. This means that they are able to measure what they intend or claim to measure, and can do it in different populations with different characteristics. These characteristics of public health tools and instruments are specifically important when working in Indian country. Because the validity and reliability of most tools and instruments are not determined for ethnic minorities, results from studies need to be carefully interpreted.



Great Lakes Inter-Tribal Epidemiology Center Mission: To support Tribal communities in their efforts to improve health by assisting with data needs through: Partnership Development, Community Based Research, Education, and Technical Assistance.

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