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Educating the Public About Ecstasy: Comparing Two Forms of Research Dissemination

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How do people interact differently with panels versus a video as a vehicle to convey information to the broadest spectrum of people within the Hartford community about MDMA use and abuse?

Introduction

Almost half of the people living in Hartford today read at a 4th grade reading level or below.¹ Skills that most of us take for granted like writing a check, paying a bill, or reading a children's book pose challenges to one of every two people in the city. When considering the dissemination of research findings which could benefit a wide range of people, it's imperative to consider this. I have spent the last semester designing and then implementing a pilot study comparing two forms of research dissemination; panels created by the Institute for Community Research as part of a past study on Dust and Ecstasy in Hartford, and a movie which I created with similar messages about Ecstasy. The goal of this pilot study is to contribute to the understanding of how people in Hartford interact with each form of dissemination. From this study, I plan to make a recommendation to strengthen future research dissemination within the Hartford community.

Relevant Literature

Research Dissemination

Research dissemination is a hot topic in the social science field. As technology is on the rise, "new media" and the use of other technology is becoming increasingly popular to share research findings with communities. Historically, social science research is conducted, papers are written, and then they are published for other scholars to read and make changes accordingly. However, in the field of health research as written about by Fullilove, et al., such is not fitting anymore.

The dissemination of health information may seem to be obvious: create partnerships, write papers, repeat the message, get important leaders to echo the findings. However, it

¹ Adult Literacy Estimates: CASAS. Portland State University, © 1996
https://www.casas.org/lit/litcode/Detail.CFM?census__AREAID=5054

is actually not so obvious how we will tell the truth about health disparities. New methods are urgently needed. Even more important is a profound dedication to share new information in spite of extraordinary pressure to stick to the script as currently written.²

Because this script is so historically set, it has far reaches that influence many organizations such as the Institute for Community Research. Obtaining grants is based on the promise of doing research and publishing findings. Continued funding at the research organization is based on the organization's ability to have something to show; that something is journal articles. Because other forms of dissemination, such as videos, are not as commonly recognized by major funders such as the National Institute of Health, it doesn't matter how "effective" they are at sharing research findings. If they aren't recognized, they are worthless to the organization's existence.

However, while "new media" such as videos, pictures, and poetry are not historically acceptable forms of research dissemination, there is still a strong push towards alternative forms of data representation. In fact, these alternate forms of representation pose a possibility for closing the existing gap between dissemination research and research dissemination, between policy and the actual practice.³ According to Fullilove, et al., there has been a "... real thrust of the effort... to deepen personal experience and personal understanding."⁴ This article looks at one organization, the Community Research Group, who made a movie in order to disseminate health information about drug use and HIV, and the frequent trauma which exists in people's lives before the drug use. While funding pushed towards publishing articles, the group made a movie which included "...personal statements of people interviewed in the movie [which] helped

² Fullilove, et al., pg. 6

³ Kerner, Rimer & Emmons, 2005

⁴ Fullilove, et al., pg. 4

viewers to feel the loss of place as did the people who lived it.”⁵ This ability of viewers to relate to the people in the movie is also a trend which became apparent through my research.

As Brannen’s study found (2002), the process of sharing experiences is similar to that of doing actual research for many people. Because of this, it is important to give these participants voices to speak to other people who might one day find themselves in similar circumstances. Throughout all the articles regarding movie research dissemination, a key finding is the strong ability of movies to connect viewers to the participants. When information proposed is far outside someone’s current understanding or basic schema about something like drug use or abuse, it is much easier for one to completely reject the idea. However, if one is able to relate to the story of someone, empathy will likely be gained, therefore connecting the viewer to the content being shared.

Forms of data representation that contribute to empathetic participation in the lives of others are necessary for having one kind of access to their lives. Artistically crafted narrative, including the crafting of film, comes into play here. Facts described literally are unlikely to have the power to evoke in the reader what the reader needs to experience to know the person someone portrays. Alternative forms of data representation can make empathy possible when work on those forms are treated as works of art.⁶

Another marked benefit of using video as a tool for research dissemination is that there are many aspects of the video which can be manipulated. Because of this, every effect, transition, camera angle, etc. is important to consider.⁷ This also leaves greater room for interpretation and discussion of the video and more places where people can find relevance to their own lives. “The evolution of creating, disseminating, and analyzing video through digital

⁵ Fullilove, et al., pg. 4

⁶ Eisner, pg. 6.

⁷ Voithofer, 2005.

technologies has offered education researchers new prospects and challenges.”⁸ These prospects and challenges of dissemination through video are some which I had to become acquainted with through the process of creating a video, whether carefully watching transitions or making sure the quotes were in an order which balanced them.

There are also downfalls to the use of video as a method of research dissemination. Both Kerner, Rimer & Emmons (2005), and Eisner (1997) speak to this difficulty and the lack of true research done about the success of alternate forms of dissemination in research, while laying out potential for future progress in the field. As discussed in “The Promise and Perils of Alternative Forms of Data Representation”,

concerns for verification, truth, and precision have led us away from an experiential conception of understanding and toward a verificationist conception of knowledge—something that can be tested, packaged, imparted, and sent like bricks across the country to build knowledge structures that are said to accumulate... knowledge as process, a temporary state, is scary to many.⁹

While movies can be beneficial to create relationships between people and the material being presented, there is a fine line between being able to create empathy, and making material completely out of reach to those watching it. Since there is less clear methodology and hard data presented in most movies, including the one being made for this project, it is important to establish the purpose behind it and, in this case, present the most unbiased truth possible about experiences on Ecstasy, through personal experiences. Kerner, Rimer & Emmons (2005) speak to the intentionality of dissemination.

⁸ Voithofer, pg.6.

⁹ Eisner, pg. 5.

Much of what passes as research dissemination is in fact passive diffusion focused on expanding individual awareness to promote behavior change. The original dissemination research reports presented show that dissemination must be planned and intentional or it will not occur in a systematic manner.¹⁰

This is why, while making a movie, it is important to be clear not only in the material being presented, but also to control for different outcomes and reactions possible from it.

One article related to research dissemination that is relevant to this project is that of Ellard (2007). Ellard presents a current study that is based on a similar topic; drug use in a club/party scene, and raising awareness about drug use. This article is interesting and relevant because it is one of only a few studies which are readily accessible about a similar topic to the MDMA study, however, the outcome was only available in the form of published articles. The problem with this form of research dissemination is that there are very few people who will actually see this article because of its location (only in a scholarly journal) and lack of accessibility.

Research Design

While there are no studies in current literature exactly like that being proposed, there is one with a similar section of experimental design. Krauss, et al. (2007), planned and carried out an intervention to increase condom use among women who were considered to be at a “higher risk” for HIV. Krauss’ study was a planned intervention versus this study’s focus of research dissemination, but it put women into 4 different groups. One group of women went through counseling, one group watched a video made for the study, one group received both treatments, and the control group didn’t receive an intervention. The group which is of interest is the group that had only the brief intervention of the movie made for the study. “The 21-minute video

¹⁰ Kerner, Rimer, & Emmons, pg. 2.

developed for this project was culturally sensitive, theory-based, and reflected the learning needs of the target population...”¹¹ It shared insight about condom use and non-use which had emerged from the study, first with women sharing their life stories and their HIV infection, and second responding to different statements and beliefs about condom and drug use. The findings of this study indicated that the women who saw the movie had the greatest increase in use of protection, and reacted to the movie in a range of ways; some women showed fear resulting from the movie while others found the information to be relevant to their lives and experiences. While the purpose of my study is not to instill fear in the participants, personal relevance comparisons between the two forms of research dissemination is important. This is one of the main reasons that I was interested in comparing how people interacted with the panels and the movie.

Ecstasy and Ecstasy Use in Hartford

The last group of literature relevant to this research is that related to Ecstasy and Ecstasy use in Hartford. The first authors which examine Ecstasy use are Boeri, Sterk, and Elifson (2004). They look at Ecstasy in “nontraditional” locations, that is, outside of the rave scene. This is relevant to this study because, like the MDMA study, it asserts that Ecstasy is found outside of traditional locations, therefore supporting the necessity of a broader spanning intervention. If people were only using Ecstasy in clubs, sharing results and intervening in behavior would likely only be necessary in relation to these places.

Another study related to Ecstasy use is that by Carlson, et al., (2004). This study is relevant because it is based on a similar study to the MDMA project, but it looks at the barriers to intervention researchers feel exists. Armed with information, dissemination and intervention

¹¹ Krauss, et al., pg. 4.

barriers which might exist can be explored to determine if participants who view the movie and the panels face similar barriers in interacting with each. Similar to this was research done by Peters, Kok, & Abraham (2008) exploring trends among Ecstasy users and suggesting key ideas to target in interventions in order to discourage use. By understanding key trends found by other researchers, the use of certain quotes and ideas to represent trends about Ecstasy use can be supported.

Eiserman, Diamond, & Schensul (2005) provide the basis for the existing panels about Ecstasy use in Hartford. Through this literature, Ecstasy use and the environment in Hartford which existed when the panels were made can be compared to current Hartford data and information from this current Ecstasy study. While there are fewer participants in this study, it provides a critical understanding of how Ecstasy use has both changed and remained the same over the past approximately 10 years. By comparing the messages that are presented in this study to what was presented in the previous panels, we can also evaluate what should be added to, and updated on, the panels based on an understanding of this study.

The apparent gap in literature comparing two forms of dissemination is why my research is both relevant and necessary. I feel as though it's extremely important to share research findings with the community and with the people who will actually be influenced by it. By having people look at the panels and watch the movie, and asking questions about the two tools, one step can be taken towards making community research benefit the community. By reviewing literature looking at the effectiveness of "new media", prior studies about drugs and research dissemination, and Ecstasy use, specifically in Hartford, I hope to explore and contribute to the current knowledge base of research dissemination.

Background.

The Institute for Community Research is a research organization located in Hartford, Connecticut. The organization "...conducts research in collaboration with community partners to promote justice and equity in a diverse, multiethnic, multicultural world. We engage in and support community-based research partnerships to reverse inequities, promote positive changes in public health and education, and foster cultural conservation and development."¹² There is a wide range of research projects that are conducted at the Institute for Community Research at a given time, for example, a female condom project, a housing project, and the MDMA project. I have been part of the MDMA project for the past year, acting as both an intern and a student ethnographer. From this work, I became interested in looking at the vehicles of research dissemination which were used on the project.

From approximately 1999 to 2006, there was a similar research study done at the Institute for Community Research about Ecstasy and Dust in Hartford, called "Rollin' and Dustin'," from which portable panels were created. These panels were the primary dissemination methods for the study. They included information about Ecstasy and Dust use and abuse in Hartford, and were in cartoon form and follow the lives of several characters, incorporating data and charts/graphs that are eye-catching and interesting. This vehicle for sharing information was first targeting youth, and then their families and educators. They are reading heavy, however, and therefore only reach a limited audience. This audience may be particularly limited given the demographics of Hartford and the participants in the study. In the case of the MDMA project, I

¹² Institute for Community Research. www.incommunityresearch.org.

think that there are many other groups of people who are both affected by Ecstasy use in Hartford and could also benefit from being educated about the prevalence and risks of it.

Based on recent research, a high percentage (41%) of Hartford citizens are at a 4th grade reading level or lower, and 73% of people living in Hartford are of literacy Level 1 or 2.¹³

The *National Adult Literacy Survey* found that 21 percent of American adults had Level 1 literacy skills, and 27 percent of American adults had Level 2 literacy skills. While there are no exact grade equivalents, Level 1 literacy is generally defined as less than fifth-grade reading and comprehension skills, and Level 2 is generally defined as fifth through seventh grades reading and comprehension skills. Although many Level 1 adults could perform tasks involving simple texts and documents, all adults scoring at Level 1 displayed difficulty using certain reading, writing, and computational skills considered necessary for functioning in everyday life. Almost all Level 1 adults could read a little, but not well enough to fill out an application, read a food label, or read a simple story to a child.¹⁴

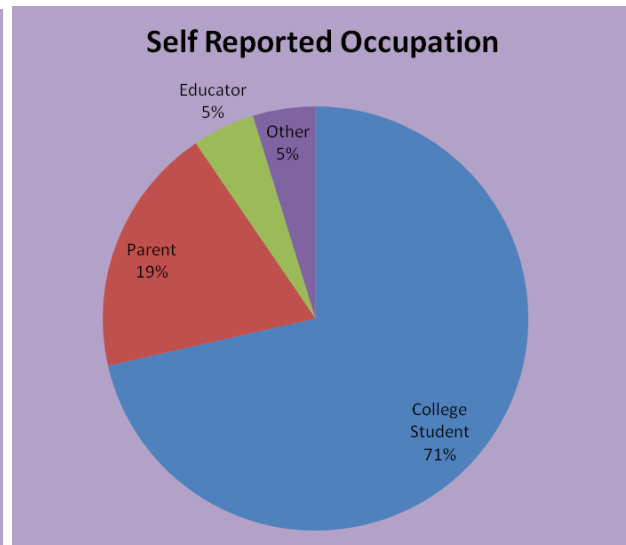
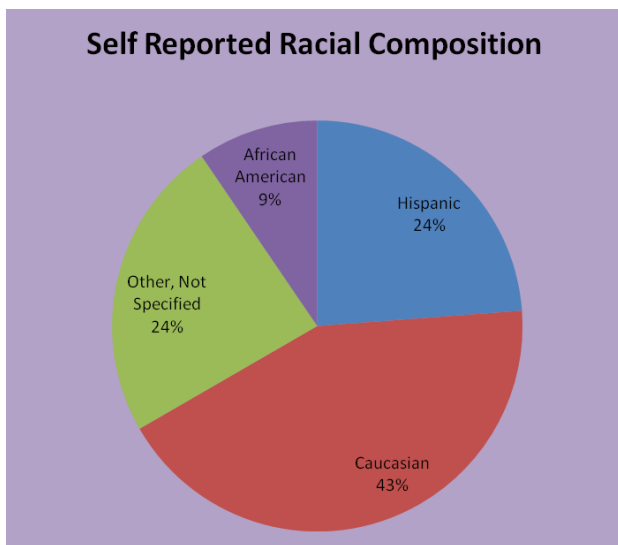
Because of this disparity, I think it's important to try to incorporate other forms of communication such as audio-visual media, not to dumb the information down, but to make it more accessible to people of different ages, backgrounds, and educational levels. Also, since the sample from the MDMA study covers a broad range of people, such as people living in shelters and teenagers, it is important to share information with people from these groups as well. The Institute for Community Research values in-community research, and a reciprocal relationship between the organization and the Hartford community. According to their own philosophy, it is vital to share information broadly from their studies. Because of this, it is vital to share this valuable information to everyone in the community, not just people who seek it out and are "filtered" for based on the resources available for dissemination.

¹³ Adult Literacy Estimates: CASAS. Portland State University, © 1996
https://www.casas.org/lit/litcode/Detail.CFM?census__AREAID=5054

¹⁴ United States Department of Transportation - **Federal Highway Administration**
<http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/hep/lowlim/lowlim4.htm>

Participants

In this pilot study, I conducted three focus groups at two different study sites; one site was Trinity College, a community which is an integral part of the larger Hartford community, and the second site was Trinfo Café in Hartford which draws a wide variety of people. At the second site, I conducted 2 focus groups, one in the morning and one in the evening to get a broader range of participants. Across all focus groups, there were a total of 21 participants who came from a range of backgrounds and parts of Hartford. Five of the 21 participants self-reported as Hispanic, specifically of Puerto Rican and Peruvian descent, 9 of the 21 self-reported as Caucasian, 2 self-reported as African American, and the remaining 5 either did not specify a race or ethnicity, or self-reported as “other”. Fifteen of the participants marked that they were college students, 4 were parents, one was an educator, and the remaining participant selected “Other”. The average age was 25, with a range from 18 to 62, and the sample was 52% female (11 participants) and 48% male (10 participants).



Methods

I developed and implemented a pilot study looking at how people from Hartford interacted with a series of panels and a movie. I then conducted three focus groups at two different sites, and collected qualitative data regarding how people living in Hartford interacted with the panels versus the movie. Qualitative methods were chosen for the study because I felt it was necessary to allow participants to speak freely and in a group to really get to the root of their interaction with each media. I chose this method as I didn't feel that a standard survey format alone would have yielded the same depth of information. It would not have engaged people in conversation which was a key aspect of my research, and I likely would not have gotten the same sort of information supporting the incorporation of community members in the analysis and dissemination of findings.

The Panels.

In the initial phase of my data collection, I selected 7 panels from the ICR study on Ecstasy and Dust in Hartford that looked specifically at Ecstasy use in Hartford. 'Rollin' and Dustin' in Hartford: Pathways to Urban Life Styles' explores the spread, use and consequences of drugs, specifically Dust (PCP) and Ecstasy (MDMA), among young adults between the ages of 16 and 30 in the Greater Hartford area. The exhibit details findings from two ICR projects over the past 10 years (from approximately 1999 to 2006), portrayed through comic book characters, photographs and quotations from youth in the study area, on thirteen 9 x 3 foot panels. The panels were created through a collaboration between ICR and the Hartford Animation Institute.¹⁵

¹⁵ Institute for Community Research, <http://www.incommunityresearch.org/programs/ulsopening.htm>.

The panels were aimed at youth and the general population in the Hartford area. Information, data, and quotes cover the large yellow panels with characters that represent the study sample. Researchers of the target age group act as the panel narrators. Photographs from different locations around Hartford are interspersed among the data and quotes with intention of conveying contextual authenticity.

The panels were not intended to represent a form of prevention intervention. Instead their purpose was to inform people in the greater Hartford area about the use and effects of Dust and Ecstasy. By creating greater knowledge of these drugs, the research/education team hoped to encourage discussion and more informed decision making among people in Hartford and surrounding areas.

The Movie.

Before collecting data, I had to create a movie for participants to interact with. It was important that this video share similar stories and information as the panels so that the messages were the same. I first looked at each quote on the panels to determine the intended message, and then matched quotes from the current MDMA study with these themes. Originally, I considered using some of the exact quotes from the panels in the movie, but in the end, I decided it was more important to make the two dissemination vehicles similar time-wise so that participants would interact with each for about the same amount of time. I also felt that it was important for the information and quotes to match the media. The quotes were very short on the panels, and the movie required the use of longer quotes in order to make appropriate use of the medium. I also thought that, since the information from the current study was similar to that of the past

study from which the panels were created, it would be beneficial to use current quotes so that the movie was updated and more applicable to the current study.

After identifying the quotes, I re-recorded them in order to protect the confidentiality of the interviewees from whom the quotes were obtained. I also ensured that the stories were as true to the participant as possible by both race and gender. The length of the movie was nine and a half minutes, and featured both positive and negative stories of Ecstasy. The quotes were placed on a background of pictures from all over Hartford because this was the study site, and since I couldn't use the participants' faces with the stories due to confidentiality, pictures from the neighborhoods were the next closest thing to showing the diversity of Hartford, along with the diversity among the users of Ecstasy.

Methods (continued)

Participants were seated and gave verbal consent to participate in the anonymous and voluntary focus group. Verbal consent was given because I wanted to ensure that participants were completely anonymous throughout the process in order to encourage honesty. Then, I gave the participants a brief overview of the focus group process. Participants completed a short survey (Appendix 1) that collected demographic information, and information about how well the panels informed participants about the use and effects of Ecstasy in Hartford either while they were looking at the panels or right after looking at them. During this time, I observed how participants moved through the 7 panels, and after filling out the survey and looking at the panels (about 10-15 minutes), participants then joined a short focus group. Surveys were collected, and the focus group began. I asked a series of questions (outlined in Appendix 2) relating to how the participants interacted with the panels. A key part of my research project was creating an

effective way to collect and analyze data to determine how people interacted with the panels and the movie. Interaction occurs at many different levels; it has to do with what first catches one's eye and draws them in, and also with what information appeals to someone and keeps their interest. To determine how people in Hartford interact with the panels, I asked a wide range of questions, and followed up as necessary to ascertain what appeals to a wide audience. The questions that were asked related to what caught their eye, what they liked, what their favorite part was, etc., in an order that went from surface and very low risk and got increasingly more focused and deeper beneath the aesthetics of the panels. It is also important to note that the same questions were used for both the panels and the movie so that comparisons between the two vehicles could be made.

After the first focus group was over, I showed participants the movie that I developed. After viewing the movie, I had participants join the focus group again, and reflect on the video, using the same series of questions. One difference between looking at the panels and watching the movie was that the participants were not asked to fill out the survey after the movie because I felt that this information would not be reliable. The reason for this is because after looking at the panels, it is presumed that participants would have gained more knowledge about the use and effects of Ecstasy than the knowledge they had when they initially came in. The previous experience of looking at the panels could taint how the movie informed participants. This was also the reason behind one limitation of my study. I focused on comparing interaction with the panels and the movie instead of looking at the relative value of each, that is, which is a more "effective" form of dissemination. In order to compare relative value, it would have been necessary to have half of the participants look at the panels first, and have the other half watch the movie first.

After this focus group was completed, I asked participants some comparison questions about the panels and movie, such as which they thought their friends would learn more from and what the main message was of each vehicle. By understanding how people related differently with each of the two forms of dissemination, I hoped to gain more insight about how participants interacted with the panels and movie, whether similarly or differently.

Data and Analysis

Overall, participants believed that the panels and the movie shared a similar message but served different purposes, and they agreed that the two forms of dissemination, when used together, had the greatest impact. Participants differentiated between the two forms by saying that the panels provided more information and data about Ecstasy, while the movie provided a personal and emotional connection. From this study, I found that interactions with the different forms of research representation varied among the residents of Hartford, and that it is very important to pay attention to the medium of dissemination across differing groups. It is also vital to use research dissemination as a catalyst for two-way, ongoing conversation between the researcher and the community, and in order to initiate conversation, it is necessary to engage the community through multiple mediums.

Interacting with the Panels

Participants had a wide range of reactions when looking at the panels, though there were several recurrent themes that emerged. Participants found the panels to be: a) engaging and interesting, b) easy to relate to, and c) to be well-rooted in research and data. These three themes

undoubtedly influenced the way that participants interacted with the panels, and are vital in understanding the relationship between viewer and panel.

Engaging

The first recurrent reaction with regard to the panels was that the panels were engaging and interesting. One participant said that specifically, the colors were “poppy”. Many participants spoke to the fact that the panels were not just like reading facts, but instead they were inviting and interesting. In fact, when asked what the first aspect of the panels that caught their eye was, all of the responses had to do with the engaging nature of the panels, from the large title text to the characters, photographs and graphs.

In the third focus group, the participants commented on the story book nature of the panels. The aspect that a few of the participants enjoyed the most was that, while there was a lot of text on the panels, there were characters and pictures which made it much more accessible, and more closely related to a comic strip with characters sharing information through text bubbles. For example, one participant spoke to this:

My favorite part was being able almost, to just read what people were saying as part of, it’s not like you’re reading facts, or just reading quotes in general, it’s more inviting to the person to read something from a kid’s mouth per say, than just to have it, to see it as a quote, and that’s my favorite part of the panels.

Hearing a participant acknowledge the difference between reading a quote and seeing it in a text bubble as part of a conversation is important in understanding how people interact with the panels. Related to the different ways information is conveyed, another one of the key reasons that people liked the panels was the diverse nature of the information on the panels and the way it was conveyed. Instead of writing about how drugs such as Ecstasy are all over media, there were popular songs listed that most people looking at the panels recognize, and actual headlines

related to Ecstasy from the Hartford Courant, in the form of newspaper cartoons. Also, the use of characters to convey messages made the information more accessible to a wider range of people. “I think the cartoons too, it makes it seem like more, something entertaining that kind of draws you in, it does not seem like a public health message, so I feel like, it kind of, might be more available to more people.” This participant also reflected on the engaging nature of the panels through the use of neutral information that people can relate to.

Relatable

Another theme that came up when participants were asked about how they interacted with the diverse information on the panels was that everyone could relate to at least one aspect of the information in them. The characters were made to represent the population of Hartford; therefore the race of the characters represented the races in Hartford at the time the panels were created, making it easier for people who live in Hartford to relate to them. Also, the use of photographs from around the Hartford area made it easy for people who lived in Hartford or spent time in Hartford to relate to that aspect of the panels. If the pictures on the panels were random pictures from places other than Hartford, it could be more difficult for someone from Hartford to relate to the information being conveyed, or to separate him or herself. However, when there are pictures of your neighborhood, it is more difficult to disassociate yourself from it. This is an important reaction to consider because if people aren't able to relate to the information, for example if they've never spent time in Hartford, the information being disseminated would not be as effective.

One participant in particular spoke to his ability to relate to the information on the panels. While looking at one panel which describes the drugs and some side effects associated with

them, he felt a connection to the information based on an experience he had while on the drug when he felt similar side effects to the ones described in the panel. “I feel in touch with that... That’s exactly what it do to you, you get stuck.” This ability to confirm the validity of the information on the panels as well as relate to the content is important when considering how people interact with them.

Grounded in Research

A third theme that emerged among discussion about the panels was the fact that the information was backed by research, and it was clear that much research had been conducted. This theme was one that spanned all the people who experienced the panels. In the focus group at Trinity College, many participants focused on the strong use of data to support the claims about Ecstasy and STDs in Hartford. “I think all the empirical stuff helps with, at least for me, because I like reading about all this sociology stuff and it helps because you see like the numbers...” Also, the data was something that caught the eye of the participants during the Trinity focus groups because it was a quick way to see what the panels were about. “I was drawn to the graphs because that’s a quick way to see the results and the tendencies of E and how it’s risen so much.” Another participant said:

I think the web is interesting because it’s sort of like, think you’re just popping a pill, that it’s only you that’s being affected, but the fact is when you look at that graph, you see that it’s not just a solitary act, it’s like, the ramifications of what you do affects a whole bunch of other people. And like, you got like four people with like crabs and syphilis and all that. I think that that’s very like effective, in like, showing that it’s not only you being affected.

This participant liked the empirical data because the use of the graphics really opened his eyes to the reality of STDs and drug use in his community. In the focus groups at Trininfo, participants were also drawn to the empirical data, specifically the graphs about STDs and Ecstasy because,

as one participant said, he could look at the data and relate it to real life, and his experiences in Hartford with girls who were hesitant about getting tested.

What's Missing?

One final piece in understanding how participants interacted with the panels comes from what the participants thought was missing from the panels, or what their least favorite aspects were. The main aspect that some people commented on in the Trinity focus group was the fact that there was too much text on the panels, so it was hard to get through it all, and somewhat overwhelming in the beginning. Other than the large amount of text, the only other recommendation that participants had was to include more information about side effects because they found it to be interesting.

Interacting with the Movie

After looking at the panels and taking part in a short focus group about them, participants then watched the movie. The movie was made specifically to line up with the messages that were shown in the panels so that the two forms of media shared similar information. After watching the movie, participants then took part in another focus group about the movie, and were asked the same questions that were asked about the panels. The purpose of using the same questions was to get to the root of the interactions with both. Many different ideas were shared about the movie, but the two main ideas which were reiterated were a) the eye-opening nature of the movie, and b) the participants' ability to relate to the movie, specifically through the effective use of characters in it.

Eye-opening

The first insight which came up in the focus groups was the eye opening nature of the content in the movie. As one participant put it:

I, I, I think I probably, I'm dumb-founded because, I honest to God, can't believe that, it's like this is very, very dangerous behavior. We're not just talking about minor risky behavior, were talking about deadly risky behavior. And the other thing that struck me that is very upsetting to me, was the story about the woman who couldn't even get out of bed, etc, etc. And it occurred to me that if she were a middle class woman, she would have probably gone to her therapist or her psychiatrist, gotten anti-depressants or prescription drugs, and would have been dealing with some of the issues that plagued her, but since she didn't have that opportunity, she was self-medicating, clearly. And I think a lot of people were doing that. They couldn't face life as it was, and they took it to escape. That poor kid that couldn't have any fun at the club, was, what is it, rolling? That's really sad. I found the whole thing profoundly sad... that was pretty eye opening.

This participant was astonished by what was going on in her community. Other participants also reflected on the eye opening nature of the movie, specifically due to the real voices, telling real stories, and speaking what many participants believed to be the truth about Ecstasy. Overall, participants seemed to be more emotionally struck by the movie than by the panels.

Relatable

Related to the idea of real voices telling real stories, another common reflection about the movie was the ease in relating to it. Interestingly, different groups related to the movie because of different aspects of the movie, such as the voices and the pictures depending on where they were from. In one Trinfo focus group, the participants all agreed that their favorite part of the movie was "showing the blocks where we're from... showing the heart of the city." To them, the fact that the pictures in the movie represented their neighborhood engaged them more in the material. In the Trinity focus group, participants spoke more to the voices as being their favorite part of the movie.

It's not preachy either. It's just people telling the account of what happened. None of them were like don't do this, it will ruin your life. It was, they were just describing how it was ruining their life and we were never told, hey, this ruined my life, we just thought that as a result, that shows it was effective.

This participant reflected on the use of voices, not to preach anti-drug messages, but instead to share experiences. Other participants spoke to the use of voices as well, noting that the use of different voices and actually being able to hear people talk keeps people engaged in the material. Also, the fact that the voices were of young adults made it easier for some of the participants who were themselves young adults to relate to the material.

What's Missing?

As with the panels, what participants thought was missing from the movie is also key in understanding how people engage with the material. In the discussion about the movie, every focus group spoke to the fact that pictures of people, or videos of people talking would have strengthened the movie. Most participants wanted to see the faces of the people who were talking, regardless of the fact that they were not the actual people who spoke about their experiences. One participant said that this could leave a mark because images (whether of different areas around Hartford or of people of different races) can be used to show that "...it's not just like a black drug, or an urban drug..." Another participant also confirmed this notion. "...We probably all had a picture of a face in our head while we were watching it, but if all of a sudden you were to snap to someone in a suit and tie, none of us would have been expecting that..." As will be discussed later, these recommendations are a key finding which support the integration of community members in the analysis and dissemination of research findings. One of the key ideas behind keeping the images in the movie simple was to ensure that the photographs didn't take away from the content of the stories being told, and a few participants

confirmed that. “Interestingly enough, I did not think that the visual took away from the voices. I thought they worked well together.” However, participants across the focus groups suggested a wider range of images related to Ecstasy, from pictures of the pill to pictures of raves and clubs.

Comparing the Panels and the Movie

During the final part of the focus groups, participants were asked to reflect on their experiences with both the panels and the movie, and compare the two. They were asked questions about topics such as the differences in messages, which characters they related to better, and from which form of dissemination they learned more. In general, all of the participants agreed that the panels and movie had a similar message, but served different purposes, each serving its purpose effectively.

Shared Message.

Participants agreed that the message behind the panels and movies was similar; to discourage use of Ecstasy as it is a dangerous drug. When asked in the survey what the most important message was on the panels, 11 of the 21 participants (53%) mentioned these themes, and many more offered the same reasoning after watching the movie and relating to the stories. One participant summed up the other themes which were mentioned by participants by saying, “E is on the rise, especially in Hartford and action must be taken.”

When looking at the panels, the majority of participants moved throughout the series, reading bits and pieces. Many participants were drawn to the charts and text boxes on different panels, and I believe this plays a major part in the participants’ views of the message. The charts and boxes that many participants mentioned were the STD web which was colorful and caught the reader’s attention, and the side effects box that has a different font, size and color, and again

draws in the reader's eye. People seek out normative messages when they are presented with information. When learning about a drug such as Ecstasy, people want to know if it is a safe option for them, their friends and family. In many instances, even if a dozen quotes are presented sharing positive experiences on Ecstasy, when there is one quote that shows a dramatically negative experience such as death, people are going to remember that message. So even in the case of both the panels and movie, where each negative experience is weighed against a positive experience, and the message in the movie is not intended to be solely a warning about the dangers of Ecstasy, the quotes that people mentioned were all negative. One participant mentioned a quote which spoke about being stuck in a bathroom because everything was a "blob", another one spoke about a woman who was depressed and couldn't even get out of bed without Ecstasy, and many participants spoke about the final quote which related Ecstasy to death. In fact, in the final quote of the movie (excerpt below), the interviewee mentioned that she just uses Ecstasy in moderation, but the fact that Ecstasy use resulted in death was enough to give participants a message of the dangers of Ecstasy.

And right then and there, I said, you know, fuck that. The triple stacks, the death ones, I'll take a single, the lowest dosage. I like the lowest dosage cause I upgrade it with my liquor and it goes up. But the girls decided to take the death ones. And I didn't know that one pill can honestly kill you instantly and you could just drop and just die right there and then. I never knew that. And so, those girls really, really dropped in front of my face.

While the intention of the movie was to simply share representative information from a non-normative study of the culture of Ecstasy use, participants got an overwhelmingly negative message of "just saying no" to Ecstasy.

Separate Purpose.

The purpose of the panels was different from the purpose of the movie. The panels were created with purpose of being informational, giving background and data about Ecstasy.

You can go online or read a book about the information, it's so accessible. I feel like drug information is really accessible to students. But to really get a firsthand account, you can only get that if you try it, or you know your friend that did it, so it kind of makes it more safe than that situation.

As this participant says, data and drug facts about Ecstasy are readily available for educational purposes. But the purpose behind the panels was to make the information real, humanizing the data presented on the panels. Participants were also asked if they thought their friends would learn more from the panels, the movie, or both in order to figure out which form of dissemination the participants liked better and learned more from, without having to disclose their own personal opinion.

I think the panels are more so for informational purposes, like we were saying earlier, and I guess the video drives home those informational purposes. So I think that the video with the panels is probably more effective, but think for learning what you want people to learn, I think the panels are probably more effective.

Because of the different objectives of the two forms of information dissemination that this participant states, the conclusion across the focus groups that I conducted was that the use of the panels and the movie together would be the most effective way to educate people about Ecstasy. Related to this, when participants were asked about which dissemination tool they felt more connected to and which characters they related to, the same was also true. Many participants said that they related more to the voices in the movie, but there were also many people who said that they related to the panels or related to both equally, in different ways.

Limitations

One of the key limitations of my research is that my study is not generalizable due to the fact that the study sample is not representative of the Hartford community. Due to the IRB process and the importance of confidentiality, I wasn't able to include anyone under the age of eighteen in the research. Because of this, a large part of the Hartford population is not represented in my sample, and it's impossible to predict how that integral age group would react to an individual form of research dissemination. Also, given the time limits of the research (one semester to design, conduct, and analyze data), I was only able to conduct three focus groups at two different sites, in one section of Hartford. Ideally, in order to get a representative sample, it would have been necessary to travel to all different parts of Hartford, and make sure that each population that exists (whether racial, socioeconomic, education-level, etc.) is represented. Examples of these different sites which could potentially act as research sites could be homeless shelters, schools, and health clinics.

A little more than half of my sample was Trinity students, and a high majority of the participants (fifteen or 71%) indicated on the survey that they were college students. Because of this, educationally speaking, my sample does not line up with that of Hartford. This is a key limitation because it's possible that people who are less-educated could interact differently with the movie and the panels, therefore engaging in very different conversation from what I found. Given the low literacy level, the panels could potentially present a problem both on a reading level and on a concentration level. However, without a more representative sample, it's impossible to truly understand how people from Hartford interact with the panels and the movie.

Given more time, it would also have been interesting to change the research design in order to ascertain which dissemination tool is more educational. In order to do this, it would be necessary to administer a baseline survey to first compare the participants' initial knowledge about Ecstasy, and then to assign half of the study sample to look at the panels first, and the other half to watch the movie first. By doing this, it would be possible to compare which increased participants' knowledge most, an important characteristic in understanding means and content of communication.

Significance and Implications

Due to the above limitations, further research is necessary on the subject of effective research dissemination, particularly the comparison of different forms of research dissemination. However, from the focus groups that I conducted, the power of integrating the community in the analysis and dissemination of data became apparent. Participants brought up many ideas when discussing the drawbacks of both the panels and the movie that I did not think of, such as showing the diversity of Ecstasy use and users through faces of business men in the movie. This is proof that including community members in analyzing data would likely bring out different themes, topics, and interpretations of the data, and their input in dissemination methods, such as adding faces to the movie, would make the dissemination more relatable to community members. Also, when community members are integrated in the analysis and dissemination of research findings, it encourages and provides participants with membership and ownership of the data. This feeling of ownership in the data encourages participants and community members to engage in the two-way conversation between researcher and community that is vital to community/research partnerships and effective collaboration and dissemination.

This study also has implications for the Institute for Community Research, along with other in-community research organizations, and at a broader level, for research funders. First off, this study confirms the notion that the most effective conversation starters and dissemination comes from reaching out to community members through the greatest range of mediums that is possible. I encourage the use of multiple dissemination methods in order to establish a feeling of membership for the broadest range of community members, regardless of their educational level, race, background, occupation, or otherwise.

This notion has broader implications for research funders as well. As was discussed earlier, the most common form of research dissemination is published journal articles which a very limited group of people, specifically academics, have access to. This is what funders look for as proof of successful research. From this study and potential future studies comparing interactions with different forms of dissemination, I believe that funders should encourage and support the use of different forms of dissemination, such as movie. This would encourage better community/ research relationships, and allow information which is vital in communities to effectively be disseminated in them. With no budget and very limited expertise in making movies, I was able to create a short movie to disseminate similar research findings as the panels. I cannot imagine what would be possible with the support of movie makers and funding.

Conclusion

In conclusion, participants believed that the panels and the movie shared a similar message but served different purposes. They agreed that the two forms of dissemination, when used together, had the greatest impact and made strong recommendations, supporting an interactive approach towards research dissemination.

Interactions with the different forms of research representation varied among the residents of Hartford, and that it is very important to pay attention to the medium of dissemination across differing groups. It is also vital to use research dissemination as a catalyst for two-way, ongoing conversation between the researcher and the community, and in order to initiate conversation, it is necessary to engage the community through multiple mediums. The potential of including community members in the collection, analysis, and dissemination of data is a prospect which would encourage community/research relationships, and encourage membership and ownership in research which otherwise would be isolated to the academic realm in scholarly journals.

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Appendix B

Focus Group Questions- Panels

1. How did you find the experience of looking at the panels?
2. What was your favorite part of the panels?
3. Who do you think the panels target and why?
4. What was the first thing that caught your eye on the panels?
5. Which aspects of the panels did you like most - e.g. visual presentation, presentation of characters through sound or animation, photographs, etc.
6. Any aspect you didn't like?
7. Is there any information you think is missing from the panels or would like to know more about?
8. Any other questions or comments?

Focus Group Questions- Movie

1. How did you find the experience of watching the movie?
2. What was your favorite part of the movie?
3. Who do you think the movie targets and why?
4. What was the first thing that caught your eye on the movie?
5. Which aspects of the panels did you like most - e.g. visual presentation, sound dimension, presentation of characters through sound or animation, photographs, etc.
6. Any aspect you didn't like?
7. Is there any information you think is missing from the movie or would like to know more about?
8. Any other questions or comments?

Focus Group- Comparison

9. Do you think your friends would learn more (about Ecstasy) from the panels, movie, or both? Why?
 - a. What specifically will your friends learn from either one?
10. Did you like the panels or movie better and why?
11. Which of these presentations did you feel more connected to?
12. Which did you learn more from, and why?
13. In your overall opinion, which was better in conveying information to you about Ecstasy?
14. Did you get different messages from each of these forms of presentation? What were they?
15. Did you relate to characters on the panels versus the movie differently? Which characters did you feel more connected to? Which ones were more, which ones less like you?
16. Any other comments or questions?