

Creating Culturally Grounded Videos for Substance Abuse Prevention

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ABSTRACT. This article describes and critiques the pilot phase of a project in which an ethnically diverse group of students from a large southwestern urban high school created culturally based substance abuse prevention videos for urban middle school students. The rationale evolved from research that suggested that a peer-created, culturally-specific approach to drug abuse prevention would be more effective than would programming created by adults operating from a "so-called" culturally-neutral" perspective. The dual perspective of this article includes both the field experiment *per se* and the data collected, using a case study perspective. Overarching themes of culture and power are discussed, as are the elements of age and gender. Impli-

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cations extending beyond the pilot offer insights for researchers and practitioners. [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <getinfo@haworthpressinc.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> © 2002 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

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INTRODUCTION

Substantial publicity about the dangers of adolescent substance abuse exists. However, studies have found that new generations are suffering from a form of "generational forgetting" demonstrated by decreased negative attitudes regarding drugs and their use (Johnston, O'Malley & Bachman, 1994). Beginning in about the seventh-grade and continuing thereafter, experimentation rates skyrocket (Johnston et al., 1994). In general, substance users are increasingly younger, with use beginning as early as elementary school although, statistically, the average age of onset is between 12 and 13 years old (Botvin et al., 1994; Carlson, 1994; Novello & Schosky, 1992).

To counter the severe rise in adolescent drug use indicated by these statistics, social scientists are developing substance abuse prevention programs specifically for junior high adolescents. In general, school-based substance abuse prevention approaches have been proven ineffective, and have not been assessed for effectiveness with ethnic minority students (Forgey, Schinke & Cole, 1997). Indeed, for the most part, they have been created by and for mainstream populations then implemented with all groups (Polansky et al., 1999). Numerous surveys of substance use have utilized Latino/a adolescents as subjects, though few have regarded this group of adolescents as *expert informants*. School-based prevention research involving Latino youth remains rare despite findings that programs were more influential when they reflected the unique cultural characteristics of the group of students for which they were designed (Botvin et al., 1995; Castaneda, 1994).

Groups vary widely in their susceptibility to drugs, their attitudes regarding drugs, and their methods for deflecting drug offers (Collins, 1995; Korzenny, McClure & Ryzttki, 1990). In some parts of the country, Mexican American youth have reported receiving drug offers at a significantly higher rate than European Americans or African Americans (Hecht, Trost & MacKinnon, 1997). However, simply comparing ethnic groups to dominant groups and then noting differences rein-

forces ethnic stereotypes without adding to theory development or clarity regarding etiology and prevention (Collins, 1995).

Substance abuse prevention programs that may be helpful for Latino youth must be "comprehensive, integrated, and intensive" to be effective (Szapocznik & Fein, 1994, p. 186). However, care must be exercised to ensure that research in this area does not foster stereotypes about traditionally oppressed groups. Historically, when the so-called culturally neutral prevention efforts fail within certain populations, the under-represented community, rather than the intervention, is often blamed (Marsiglia, Cross & Mitchell, 1998).

Regardless of the ethnic or cultural background of the group or community of interest, and despite rhetorical discussions about multiculturalism, prevention programs structured on the conviction that a culturally neutral, universal message exists continue to propagate.

THE DUAL PERSPECTIVE

Drawing from narrative theory, this project focused on developing culturally grounded prevention messages for middle school students through the medium of peer-created, reality-based, instructional video. This article documents the field experiment, discusses the data gathered, and offers substantive conclusions about the questions posed by the researchers. Further, the article explores complications that evolved out of the process and then describes some of the outcomes that could grow out of this project.

The video project pooled the efforts of a university interdisciplinary research team (i.e., Social Work, Communication, Justice Studies, Education Policy and Leadership Studies), a professional video director, and a group of high school students specifically trained in the full spectrum of media production while enrolled in a communications magnet program at a large southwestern urban high school. As envisioned by the university researchers, the project goal was to blend the talents and skills of each member of the team to produce a peer-created, culturally-and geographically-specific substance abuse prevention message for middle school students in that urban area.

The academic researchers provided the theoretical foundations, while the professional director provided the technical expertise for the undertaking. The director also was expected to guide the students enlisted to create the script, design the sets, act in, and produce the videos-toward the goal that their experiences, their voices, and their

vision, would be represented. For the completed products to maintain peer-created authenticity, the adult members of the team were expected to assist, rather than lead, the student video producers.

Enhancing the field study itself, the Case Study Report represents a retrospective view of data collected during the field experiment. The use of video ethnography and field notes allowed the analysts to read the data, and to see it in action. The divergent perspectives that developed during the field experiment were not anticipated at the inception of the video project. Dual sets of data permitted in-depth analysis of the process itself, a benefit unforeseen by researchers. Questions centered on (a) the absence of universal operational definitions, (b) the barriers to effective student-to-adult communication, and (c) the elements of the implementation process.

The varied meanings of phrases such as "made by students for students" became important factors in production discussions. Individual characteristics of team members, such as age, gender, and culture, influenced the team's communication efforts. The tacit assignment of "expert" and "novice" to individuals affected both the creative and production processes. Finally, the realization that there was great disparity among perceptions of what constituted a "universal prevention message" complicated the task. This Case Study tells the story of the students, the researchers, and the lessons they all learned.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Existing literature clarifies and validates issues that surfaced from both the Field Experiment and the Case Study Report. Issues based upon data analysis and discussion led researchers to literature addressing age, gender, culture and power as they relate to collaborative interactions. Thus, the path from the design of the Field Experiment to the conclusions of the Case Study followed from an initial emphasis on the effectiveness of media messages in school-based prevention, to the influence of interaction factors on the process of creating culturally based prevention messages in schools.

While substance abuse prevention is a common goal, many approaches have failed to change the actual incidence and prevalence of teen substance use. Most drug education targeting teenagers has used a "passive learning model" (Franklin, 1985, p. 15). Universal, information-based programs were founded on the belief that awareness of the probably, aversive consequences of drug use practically assures drug avoidance (Bauman et al.,

1984). However, research questioning the effectiveness of "information only" prevention programs (Botvin et al., 1995; Bukoski, 1985; Tobler, 1986) found that (a) this form of intervention fails to reduce drug use and (b) some of these programs actually led to a subsequent increase in use of substances afterwards (Falck & Craig, 1988).

Prevention programs that rely solely on language do not give participants the opportunity to learn and practice the life skills or strategies they will need to draw upon when faced with a future drug use dilemma. However, in the form of a tailored video, the interest and credibility of the message was enhanced, exposing audiences to both language and action (Eakin et al., 1998).

Media Messages for Prevention

According to a recent study (Austin et al., 2000), although parental messages continued to have a small but significant effect on adolescents, students more often made their decisions based upon peers and media. According to Dimsdale and others (1998), students who watched more television and listened to the radio more frequently engaged in more risk-taking behaviors. Subjects who demonstrated strong emotional responses to media also exhibited strong emotional responses in other situations.

Some researchers tailored videos to selected audiences using media to deliver both motivational messages and prevention information (Eakin et al., 1998). They determined that one of the major advantages of using tailored videos was the attractiveness of the videos to the selected audiences. In a more recent study, Mitchell (2000) determined that the most important factor of success with the selected audience was the strength of the message; the stronger the message, the higher the level of reconciliation with the audience.

Students who found their culture and learning styles represented in the substance and format of prevention programs were more likely to be motivated to participate and to benefit from the experience (Kuykendall, 1992). By highlighting the strengths demonstrated in the evolving cultural narratives emerging from the students' lives, the prevention messages were informed by the local culture.

Culture and Media Messages

Preconceived ideas about substance use vary according to the personal histories of individuals. For that reason, who *generates* the prevention message, and who *receives* it, are factors that cannot be ignored. Caetano (1988) found that an individual's ethnic background, gender,

socio-economic status, and degree of acculturation all made substantial contributions to drug use preferences and behaviors. Eigen and Siegel (1991) reported that African American and Latino/a youth responded more favorably to prevention messages from members of their own ethnic group. Austin and associates (2000), who studied adolescent viewing patterns in conjunction with their beliefs about alcohol and media messages, determined that the degree to which adolescents found portrayals desirable was contingent upon perceived similarities to their own lives and the degree to which the adolescents wished to be like them. Donnerstein and Strasburger (1999) found that the amount of influence from topics highlighted in media was directly linked to the degree to which adolescents perceived that the topics related to their real lives; the biggest problem media faced was the lack of realistic portrayals of true consequences of actions.

Census Bureau projections estimate that Latinos/as will constitute the largest ethnic minority group by the year 2010 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). The terms "Latino/a" and "Hispanic" are umbrella terms that ignore the fact that Mexican Americans (also known as Chicanos or Latinos) comprise the largest subgroup, particularly in the Southwest. Despite this increase in population, Mexican Americans often are pressured into acculturating into the "majority" society and the notion of the "universal" prevention message persists in prevention programming. Eurocentric paradigms-male, middle class, and majority group oriented-are suspect when applied to Mexican Americans (Padilla, 1995).

The so-called "culturally neutral" messages of universal substance abuse prevention programs are based upon dominant culture values, which reinforce the dominant narrative, reflecting a view of the world that neither recognizes nor celebrates the minority child or the attendant minority cultural heritage (Marsiglia & Zorita, 1996). Culturally grounded prevention messages, on the other hand, aim to acknowledge and value community-based narratives as natural, indigenous prevention messages (Miller et al., 2000).

School-Based Prevention Programming

Most programs developed for adolescents or children are implemented within the school setting. Information-based curricula (the traditional approach) were found to be saturated with exaggerated or distorted information about the consequences of drug use; such information made student skepticism a serious obstacle to program efficacy (Polansky et al., 1999). Paulo Freire (1995) described this form of peda-

gogy as "the banking approach to teaching" with the teacher possessing something that the student needs but lacks. This approach is problematic because: (a) it ignores the developmental differences between the adult teacher and the adolescent student learner; (b) it reinforces student passivity in the learning process; and, (c) it ignores the complex, contextual factors in the formation of student attitudes and behaviors.

With regard to racial and cultural differences, particularly in urban centers, most school personnel are white, monolingual English-speaking, with little training about the cultures represented in their classrooms (Reyes & Valencia, 1995). Despite the differences in world view between adults and students, knowledge can be improved through viewing videos imbedded with cultural information, especially with additional culturally based classroom activities (Cole et al., 1999).

In school-based intervention programs, empirical evidence supports the efficacy of social skills-based prevention messages (Botvin et al., 1990; Botvin et al., 1995). Thus, culturally salient, social skills-based interventions created by and for a culturally specific population are likely to demonstrate similarly positive effects (Burrows, 1999; Polansky et al., 1999).

INTERSECTIONS OF POWER

"The multiple forms and all-pervasiveness of power mean that its operation is often hidden" (Paechter, 1998, p. 57). Scholars have long been cognizant of the role that power plays in organizing social life. As a result, understanding age, culture, and gender roles within power structures is essential to recognizing the interlocking systems of power within socio-cultural institutions such as schools. When the differences are overlooked instead of addressed, processes of social dominance and structures of oppression disseminate across all dimensions of human difference and diversity (Howard, 1999). People create their identities within the bounds of these differences and negotiate the elements of their identities based upon their relationship to the social category system in place in their surroundings (Frable, 1997).

Neither adults nor youth bring "the same stuff 'into any social situation (Howard, 1999, p. 25). Within a diverse audience, the responses of the dominant culture should no longer be considered "standard" with all others being labeled as "nonstandard" (Frable, 1997). Many educators believe that all students would benefit from examining the institutional

practices that systematically favor certain racial, economic, and language groups while negatively influencing others (Lawrence, 1997).

Differentiation, due to ethnic identification and/or gender identity, has a bearing on the subscription of power within social structures. Gender identity includes not only biology and physical dimensions, but also the social constraints that emanate from existing social structures (Frable, 1997). Moreover, Figueira-McDonough (1998) posited that gender difference is especially important when viewed as a consequence of power distribution.

The regimen of schooling echoes the patterns visible in the external social and cultural environment. Those patterns include role definitions with regard to gender as well as the division of labor within the institution (McGinty, 1999). Within the classroom, males talk more often, interrupt female speakers more often, and use aggressive tactics to command attention (Paechter 1998). Paechter (1998) also suggested that classroom interactions in themselves marginalized females through the competitive nature of male-dominated dialogue that prevented female students from engaging in direct discussion with the teacher-interaction that would acknowledge the female students ideas as being valuable.

It becomes apparent, then, that a universal acceptance of a male "default" and a female "other" permeates the social structures surrounding both students and adults. Such all-pervasive socialization establishes a "naturalness" to the hierarchy of power represented-that of different and unequal (Figueira-McDonough, 1998). The educational system is structured around the dominance of the male model and subsequently, females experience constraints in freedom of movement and expression (Paechter, 1998).

Participation in any activity, especially in a learning environment, is essential for empowerment and self-expression. To maximize active participation and to provide opportunities for self-expression, dialogue must exist, and the teacher must assume a major role in the "translation" of the realities shared (Figueira-McDonough, 1998). Existing structures in schools diminish "other" student capabilities for participation and self-expression, thus Howard's (1999) assertion, "members of the dominant group in any society do not necessarily have to know anything about those people who are not like them" (p. 12). As noted by Paechter (1998), structures of learning and culture are constructed so that those who are permitted to participate fully must think and behave in certain ways-the ways of middle class white males. Wolfe (2000) also denies the contemporary emphasis on different instructional techniques for mi-

nority students; this study did not substantiate claims that particular classroom techniques changed the distribution of classroom discourse.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

As social researchers seek to understand individual and relational transactions through layered lenses and in multiple contexts, so this project was founded on carefully blended perspectives that ranged from social learning and communication competence to narrative and drama theories. This project is rooted in the multiple domains (i.e., language, age, class, gender, socioeconomic status, and racial or ethnic heritage) that are the social constructions upon which an individual builds self-identity. The image one sees through those many layers influences the basic understanding of oneself in relation to all others. Therefore, as is noted in the literature, the importance of creating a culturally specific intervention to effectively influence non-dominant adolescent participants cannot be exaggerated (Eakin et al., 1998; Hecht et al., 1993).

To reflect student cultures without stereotyping them, the prevention messages must be created from and be reflective of the personal cultural experiences of the students (Austin et al., 2000). Those experiences, or products, are a group's cultural heritage. That heritage includes the narratives, traditions, language, worldview, and values a group has in common as well as the group's history, all of which can be individually and collectively celebrated and discovered through performing arts (Marsiglia & Johnson, 1997). It is known, for example, that people who have stronger responses to music will also have stronger responses to other audio or visual materials (Dimsdale et al., 1998). In the case of television exposure, Donnerstein and Strausburger (1999) found that the more the television exposure reflected the real lives of adolescents, the more the adolescents desired to be like the actors in the portrayal.

Most mediated messages designed for adolescents, as well as other consumers, focuses on the narration of characters' personal stories. Narrative Theory conceptualizes a people's beliefs and actions as stories, or narratives, which are an ever-present "mode of discourse through which people organize information and experiences" (Marsiglia & Holleran, 1999). Adolescents are cognitively and developmentally amenable to creating stories to explain their lives. Narrative gives them a tool with which to think in abstract terms, to examine themselves and the world around them. According to Inhelder and Piaget (1958), narrative

allows people to think beyond their present circumstances to imagine future scenarios. Individuals interpret information based upon experience that becomes crucial when connected to others of life's influences (Bosworth, 1997; Chipongian, 2000).

Meaningful learning must be linked to some genuine experience, with an emphasis on how that experience will affect the student's life, culture, and community (NCREL, 2000). Taken together, existing research indicates that prevention messages based in specific cultural products (e.g., music, dance, drama, fiction, proverbs, communication styles, oral histories, and celebrations), produced by people with whom subjects can relate, will be more effective than any so-called culturally neutral program.

Theoretical Applications

Dramatic presentations are an enduring tradition in Mexican American cultures (e.g., *Teatro Campesino*). However, live productions are costly and can reach only a limited audience. The use of video technology provides an effective venue to reach much larger separate geographical locations. The field experiment tested the application of the Narrative Theory to prevention messages. Moreover, the project examined whether or not a group of diverse students could design, create, and produce a video implementation with a culturally grounded message for a selected group of adolescents. By structuring the intervention in dramatic presentations via videos, the project allowed participants to mediate perception and behavioral choices which, in turn, provided new perceptual frameworks for interpreting phenomena and new models for determining behavior (Marsiglia, Kulis & Hecht, 2001).

Cultural grounded images and messages in educational videos and prevention messages can communicate in a manner that feels "natural" to the target audience. An educational video is considered culturally grounded when the minority student becomes consciously aware that the context reflects *for me* and *about me* scenarios (Marsiglia, Cross & Mitchell, 1998).

The Pilot Video Field Experiment

This field experiment was based on the rationale that a peer-created, culturally-specific approach for target participants would be more effective than an intervention created by adults operating from a "culturally-neutral" perspective (Austin et al., 2000; Eakin et al., 1998; Hecht

et al., 1993). The project curricula based its use of audiovisual materials on findings that they were not only important for African American and Latino youth (Schinkle et al., 1991) but also were an effective communication tool with these groups (Eakin et al., 1998; Hecht et al., 1993).

The pilot study was conducted during the summer of 1997 to assess the implementation process used to develop culturally grounded prevention messages using educational videos that were designed and created by students for students. The student participants were provided with previously collected refusal vignettes (oral histories) from middle school students who described their personal experiences and perceptions of drug use and abuse. The oral histories provided a culturally grounded starting point in the concept development for the scripts.

The design group process was envisioned as a laboratory scenario that would generate creativity as well as engage students in the synthesis of information regarding culturally grounded prevention messages for a specific adolescent audience. The students were given the task of producing a single culturally grounded video centered on a prevention message that targeted Mexican American middle school students. Mexican American students were chosen as the target group because that population constituted the largest ethnic group in the schools.

The Case Study Report

The Case Study report documents the process of working with a diverse group of students to develop culturally grounded prevention messages for Mexican American adolescents in a large Southwestern city. It critically evaluates the pilot video field experiment, revealing and examining the strengths and drawbacks of the process and product. Thus, the report serves as a roadmap to guide future development and implementation of culturally specific interventions.

METHODOLOGY

The qualitative research design aimed at gathering as much data as possible within the most natural settings for the students. The field experiment was designed to determine whether or not this diverse group of students, working within their own sphere of influence, could produce a video that effectively conveyed prevention messages to adolescents. The use of a case study design, while limiting the ability to generalize about conclusions regarding the field experiment, offered re-

searchers other valuable insights into the elements of successful collaboration efforts involving adults and students. The pilot experience was viewed as a dress rehearsal in anticipation of the award of a major research grant to test the culturally specific approach to prevention programming for middle school students.

The Participants

Ten high school students volunteered to form the core video production group, ranging in age from 15 to 18 years old. Half of the students were African American, three were European American, and two were Mexican American. Six of the students were female. All of the members of the group were part of the Media Magnet Program at one of the most racially integrated high schools in the city. Other students from the regular high school program, largely Mexican American, participated in the auditions for parts in the videos. Twenty-five of them were chosen to play character parts. The student core group led all other production functions such as casting, filming, sound, music, and directing.

In addition to a professional video director engaged to support the student producers, a teacher at the high school magnet program acted as both the executive producer and instructor for the students. The university interdisciplinary research team facilitated student group sessions, and provided the link between the production process and the available research about both substance abuse prevention and Mexican American culture.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

Video-ethnography techniques were employed to record the video production process. The presence of the camera was non-intrusive because cameras were ever-present in the students' daily work. Participant observation, intensive interviews, and focus groups were the main data gathering tools utilized. Data were collected throughout the duration of the video production process. Four video ethnographers recorded (a) the concept development, (b) script writing, (c) auditions, and (d) production sessions. Events outside these sessions were recorded in field notes. Observation notes, interpretations of events, and other nonverbal data were recorded in journals. These data collection techniques had been identified in previous studies as the most appropriate entry into the students' world in order to research cultural specific actors (Forgey et al., 1997).

The researchers employed the technique of constant comparison throughout all phases of the field experiment. Field notes, videotapes of all group sessions, journal entries, intensive interviews, and focus group reports were constantly reviewed and analyzed. As families of themes became apparent, the research team realized that the data not only answered the questions that underpinned the field experiment, but also illuminated aspects of the implementation process. These insights encompassed implications for research beyond the field experiment.

FINDINGS

Throughout both the field experiment and the analysis of data that followed, themes materialized that illustrated the importance of examining the process in greater depth. For instance, the need for universal understanding of operational definitions based in theory became evident through the disparity of perspectives regarding the roles and expectations of participants. Some stages of the process created unforeseen communication barriers for both students and adults. At times, unacknowledged diversity and expertise led team members to regard more traditional processes and perspectives as appropriate. Moreover, initiating a collaborative effort across disciplines encompassing a wide range of knowledge and expertise as well as differentiation in age, gender and culture presented challenges for all team members. By the project's conclusion, however, data from both the Field Experiment and the Case Study had converged into two themes that remained consistent throughout the analysis process.

La Cultura (the Culture)

The ethnic composition of the group was a significant logistic barrier to the cultural-groundedness resulting in the two Mexican Americans female students on the team being marginalized by the process. One was queried about incidental aspects such as Spanish names during the script writing sessions, but her more substantial input was all but ignored by other group members. The other student attempted to contribute her authentic experiences and perceptions, but was not treated as an expert informant.

The lack of a clear Mexican American voice created a void felt by the non-Latino/a students and accentuated by the Anglo male professional director's misperceptions of Latino/a culture. For example, during the

very first meeting, the director lectured the students (many of whom were Latino/a) about 'Hispanic' culture,

Now, we are working with the Hispanic culture, and there are things to think about. OK? The Hispanic culture. When I look at films, Hispanic films.... You should look at "My [sic] Vida Loca" and "I Like it Like That" together. Look at them together to get an idea about the rhythms, the colors. The Hispanic culture, very bright, vibrant colors ... truly.

The message conveyed to the students was that these films were considered by the "expert" director as being most representative of the target population. These movies, in fact, only provided a select few Latino cultural concepts, and only as interpreted and caricatured by the film industry. Thus, although the school was located in a predominantly Mexican American neighborhood, the director (and, by inference, the producers) relied on "Hollywood" for guidance regarding cultural content. Throughout the project, the adult decision-makers assigned more legitimacy to "Hollywood's" characterization than they did to the knowledge and expertise of the student "novices" who were actually living the life the videos hoped to portray.

Though many of the students complained that they "were too young to watch R rated movies," most of them, as recommended, watched the movies as a means "to increase their cultural sensitivity." The input from students with valid experience obtained from having lived in the area, as well as the students who self identified as being Mexican American was, for the most part, ignored or silenced by non-Latino/a students and the director. This *ethnic/outsider* approach to culture continued throughout the process, expanding beyond the dearth of Mexican American representation. It became apparent that in terms of ethnicity and social class, most of the students chosen as producers represented neither the general student body nor the target audience. Using student producers drawn exclusively from the magnet program led to the omission of students who were more likely to authentically portray the rich complexities of Mexican American culture. Consequently, the construction and maintenance of a "dominant" hierarchy within the production function reinforced the misperceptions about the culture of the intended audience.

By contrast, when acting parts were advertised in open auditions, those who were more representative of the target population became involved. As students were reading the script while waiting to audition for

the different roles on the prevention video, they were interviewed by a male, Mexican American male video-ethnographer. These Mexican Americans students were very vocal when asked their opinions about how "Mexican American Culture" was represented in the scripts. More significant perhaps, the depth of their responses seemed to depend upon who was asking the questions. When the Latino ethnographer asked a Mexican American female high school student to react to the script she was reading, she said:

I'm gonna [say_it](#) like it's written here, but I wouldn't be saying it word for word because that's not the way I talk.... I'd say like, "If they're gonna be doin' that, like, that's on them, because but I ain't gonna be doin' that." They [the students] know that I'm not like that.... I wouldn't even be in that situation.... All my home girls, and stuff, they know how I am. I ain't gonna be using drugs.

This student's comments reveal that the language is not her own, and that the entire scenario is not representative of her experience. Other student comments reinforced that position. In terms of the actual behaviors portrayed in the script, a Mexican American male student told the same Latino ethnographer,

No, they're [the script's dialogues are] not real. 'Cause like I know I've been pressured to use drugs. Like I don't use it, I don't use weed. I've had like many opportunities, 'cause I know like some dealers and they're like, "Yeah, I'll give you some for free," and then, I know like they've been doing it their whole life. I'm just not. Like, this ain't real, I know that much.

Students' perceptions that what was written did not reflect what was real for them became a constant source of negotiation and debate. It appeared that there were two levels of disagreement between the script and those auditioning for the parts. Would-be actors questioned the storyline, finding it infantile and naive. The way language was used in the scripts was the second important source of disagreement. Students complained that the dialogue did not represent them or their cultural backgrounds. Language "appropriateness" became a serious issue of contention. Both male and female students made reference to the absence of culturally appropriate dialogue script, as illustrated in the following exchange:

Female Student: **This can't be the real script. It don't make no sense.**

Male Student: **I know damn well I don't talk like this either.**

Female Student: **She sounds like a white girl. Like here she says, "Especially like her Hispanic friend" and then she says, "Um, like okay." She sounds like a white girl!**

Male Student: **I know, it's like (imitating a "Valley-girl" accent) "Oh my God, I don't remember."**

Female Student: **Mexicans don't talk like that ...**

Male Student: **Damn, I don't like the script. It would be better if I could make it my own words, 'cause that's down.**

One of the two Mexican American females involved in scriptwriting argued for authenticity in an exchange with the Director. When she questioned the "Spanish parts" noting they did not make sense, the Director responded, "That's what I'm counting on you to tell me and once we get there the actors who speak Spanish will be able to say, 'Now I wouldn't say that.' And that's why one of the big bilinguals [university professors] will be there..... In actuality, (1) the actors were discouraged from changing any of the dialogue during shooting and (2) although nearly all of the Mexican American students involved in the production were bilingual, the director continually relied upon a university professor to validate the accuracy of the Spanish used.

Arguments about meaning and content continued to plague the entire process. Socialized to show respect for authority, many of the Mexican American students who had concerns avoided voicing them to anyone who might have acted on them. If some of the Mexican American students auditioning for the roles had participated in the entire creative process, there would have been a better representation of authentic cultural experience. As such, never achieving a "critical mass" of representative participants critically affected the concept development and script writing.

The definitions of "being cool" were different within the magnet program and in the milieu of the larger high school, where the music, the dress code and the language patterns had a more "pop [popular] youth" signature. The Mexican American students participating in the audi-

tions incorporated many of these aspects of urban, "pop" trends with regard to their communication and dress. Although bicultural and bilingual Mexican American students existed in both environments, in the magnet program, biculturalism was seen in a more traditional sense. As part of a proud bilingual tradition, those students seemed to take offense at the misuse of their language.

The on-going conflict over language and culture coalesced over the notion that the dialogue was "written by white girls for white girls" while, in reality, a group of African American, Caucasian and the two Mexican American girls wrote the script. Regardless of their efforts, without a structure in place to resolve the conflicts that arose, the students' concerns over language and situational content neither were resolved nor incorporated into final script.

The core group of students participating in the production of the videos began to be viewed as an elite group within the larger high school. In spite of their ethnic background, the student writers were highly acculturated into the dominant culture. Significantly, very few Mexican Americans were part of this core group. By the time the students from the greater high school community were involved, the script was already written-with disputed language, cultural misperceptions, and acculturation hierarchy imbedded within.

El Poder (the Power)

The process of making the video began by having a three-day long introductory seminar with the student producers. At the first meeting, professors from the local university lectured the students on research findings and theoretical concepts pertinent to the project. Although students were seated in a circle, they remained quiet most of the time. The adult researchers monopolized the communication process. The professional director introduced students to his approach to movie making, showing movies he had directed in the past. He stated, "I do not want to write the script. I don't. I want to help you write it. You own this."

The analysis of the video ethnography revealed a gap between the expressed intention of the adults and their behaviors. The adult-generated verbal messages were consistent in encouraging the students to gain control over the production process. Simultaneously conveyed was the message that adult knowledge was more valuable than student knowledge, and "White" experience took precedent over "Brown" experience. From that point forward, the Anglo male director became the repository of power. The next concentric circle, occupied by those close

to the director, was occupied by two also-affluent, also white male co-directors. The trio made all casting and editing decisions

As the only vocal Mexican American representative involved in the process, Teresa, had the onerous responsibility of speaking for the whole community being portrayed in the videos. She not only had the difficult task of educating others about ethnic issues; as a Mexican American female she encountered other challenges. Video ethnography footage illustrated how Teresa was excluded from the role of cameraperson reportedly due to her height.

Director: This film is going be completely hand held and I didn't think of this until now, but if the camera's on you shoulder, you're going be below everybody. I can't have the camera going in between and around if you're underneath. [Total silence for several seconds.] You know, it's so bizarre. I think that's why most cameramen are men, because they're big.

Teresa: *You* know, I have platform shoes that are like THAT! [gesturing heel height]

Director: See, my point is.... Come here a minute. [standing up]

Teresa: [Stands next to director]

Director: And see, I'm not a tall guy. I'm a short guy ...

Teresa: [Smiling] You know that's discrimination.

Director: *You* know, it is industrial prejudice.

Ironically, review of the video-ethnographic data showed that the male student who was chosen for the role spent much of his camera time bending down to get "eye level" shots. In this, the student production team had become a microcosm of the outside world. Polarization and stratification of gender is present in all aspects of culture and social structure; both a reflection of the societal condition and a reinforcement of it (Figueira-McDonough, 1998). Teresa, as a Mexican American female, had the least power and the most barriers to overcome in order to fully participate in the process of production. Notwithstanding those restrictions on freedom of movement and expression, she articulated her

opinions and was one of the most vocal opponents to renewing the contract with the professional director.

SOCIAL WORK RESEARCH AND PRACTICE IMPLICATIONS

The pilot video field experiment was envisioned as an opportunity to put into practice a research based, culturally grounded approach from a culturally ecological perspective (Germain, 1973; Ogbu, 1985; Spencer & Markstorm-Adams, 1990). The use of video ethnography data to assess the described process effectively identified the relevant issues to be considered in the field experiment approach. Issues of cultural exclusion and misrepresentation surfaced throughout the process, as did lapses in the implementation process that left these issues unresolved. Adolescents from the group targeted by the culturally grounded prevention message needed to have a strong representation in the creative process from its inception.

Students representing the target population who participated in the pilot video project emerged as the most disempowered participants in the process. Although Mexican American students were called in for the auditions once the creative process of developing the concept and writing the script was completed, they were navigating through an unrecognizable cultural continuum and could not be comfortable with the "dominant culture notions" they were expected to portray. Albeit unintentionally, the entire process legitimized existing power structures and reinforced both the status quo and media stereotypes rather than adopting an affiliation with the cultural aspects of the targeted population.

Although the overarching themes presented in this study highlight the challenges faced by the pilot project, those outcomes formed a strong foundation for the creation of the five curriculum videos that followed-the funded Drug Resistance Strategies project in 1998 (NIDA/NIH: R01 DA05629, 1997-2001).

This project has implications for researchers seeking to involve students in field-based research. First, social workers must recognize and enhance the willingness to learn, the knowledge, the performance levels, and many areas of unique expertise that students are able to bring to any adult-envisioned project. Students understand process and are eager, willing, and able to operate successfully when role expectations are clearly defined.

Second, the setting in which a project is introduced to students is very important to collaborative efforts. The inherent authority structure

within a school setting, no matter the intent of the adults or the stated expectations for students, leads to tacit student acquiescence to adult authority. Third, collaborative partners must have operational definitions and goals. The clear articulation of a "collective" knowledge base fosters effective communication among all participants. What is proposed must be linked to what students already know before they can expand to a more inclusive vision.

Most importantly, a process must be made explicit in the design of a field experiment. Such a process should include a specific direction to students that "normal" school roles may not apply in collaborative scenarios where adults are to support efforts of students. The conscious process of acknowledging expertise and skills regardless of age, gender, culture, or experience provides the foundation to build the dual perspective essential for an effective substance abuse prevention intervention.

Finally, much remains to be learned about developing culturally grounded messages with and for youth. Although it is possible that other field experiments would generate different data, the implications derived from this case study offered important insights into collaborative research efforts between adults and adolescents. Such projects provide invaluable, fresh perspectives of cultural trends while allowing researchers to conduct the studies needed to identify the praxis of media messages in prevention programming.

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