

HEALTH COMMUNICATION MATTERS! WEBINAR SERIES July 7, 2016

What's Your Peer Crowd? Identifying Your Audience and Health Messages that Resonate

Additional Resources

Peer crowd research on a budget (prepared by Meghan Moran, PhD)

1. Measuring peer crowds. Researchers have measured youth peer crowd identification in ways that could be cost effective for your organization. Typically, youth are given a survey with a list of peer crowds. They are then asked to indicate how much (on a scale of 1 to 10, or 1 to 100) they identify with each crowd, or are asked to select the single crowd (or multiple crowds) they identify with. The references below will have examples of measures you can draw on.

One way to identify the list of peer crowds is by looking to the existing literature to see the crowds that other researchers found in their work (see references below). Below is a table with names and descriptions of peer crowds I have found in my research (keep in mind that crowd names may vary regionally!)

Peer Group Profiles (from Moran & Sussman, 2014)

Peer Group	Prototypical Characteristics
Academics	Wears "regular," "normal" clothing. Spends time studying/doing homework or other school-related clubs and activities.
Deviants	Wears skinny jeans, skimpy tops for girls, baggy clothes for boys. Spends time "going out," having fun, engaging in illegal activities (shoplifting, vandalism).
Elites	Wears cool, name-brand clothing (Abercrombie, Hollister). Likes to play sports, party, go to the mall, go to movies.
Emo/Goth	Wears dark clothing, band t-shirts, eyeliner. Has piercings, dyed hair. Spends time listening to emo and goth music.
Hip-hop	Wears baggy pants, t-shirts. Likes to "hang out," dance, listen to music.
Musician	Wears "regular," "normal" clothing. Participates in school band or orchestra.
Rockers	Wears jeans, band t-shirts, "grungy clothes." Likes to listen to music, play instruments (guitar), go to concerts.
Skaters	Wears shorts, t-shirts, skate brands (Volcom, DC, Element). Spends time skateboarding/hanging out at the skateboard park.

If you work with teens (or have a teen son, daughter, niece, nephew, etc) you could also do some informal research and ask them what crowds are in their school or what crowds they are familiar with. And, you can always add an "other, please indicate: _____" option at the end in case there are youth who identify with a crowd you did not include in your list.

2. What if you can't measure your population's peer crowd identities? How can you use peer crowds for your campaigns?

While it's always best to do on-the-ground formative research, if you want to use a peer crowd approach for your campaign, you could look to existing literature to see if there are any well-established links between specific peer crowds and the behavior you want to change. Below are some references that may be useful for this, but there is plenty of additional research out there as well. Once you've identified a crowd, you will want to make sure that your campaign is authentic and will truly connect with the audience. Again, while the best way to do this is through systematic message testing, if this is not feasible then you can use resources available to you – ask teens you know to provide feedback, and/or go online and conduct an informal ethnography of the crowd to see what their passions are. For instance, if you were trying to target the skater crowd, but were not able to do formative research with any skaters, you could go to popular skate websites and follow popular skaters on social media to get a sense of what appeals to this crowd.

Some references:

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