Out of the Ivory Tower and Into the Newsfeed:

Using Webzines to Connect Critical Research with the Public Discourse

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Who Are We?

- UMass Boston
 - Department of Counseling and School Psychology
 - Counseling Psychology PhD Program
- Research Team
 - Institutional Corruption
 - Recent Projects:
 - Lack of evidence for, and possible harms of universal depression screening
 - Financial associations between authors of psychiatric diagnostic and treatment guidelines and the pharmaceutical industry



UMB Commitment to Social Justice

First Year Social Justice Project in Local Community



Transnational Social Justice Project





Mad in America Webzine

• Mission:

"To serve as a catalyst for remaking psychiatric care in the United States (and abroad)"

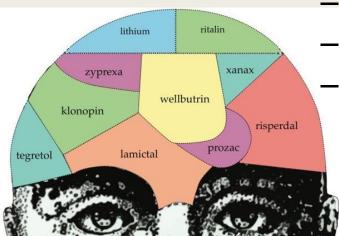
News Sources

Psychiatric research

- Journalism
- Forum

Writers:

- People with lived experience
- Peer specialists
- Family members
- Psychiatrists
- Psychologists
- Social workers
- Program managers
- Journalists
- Attorneys



Collaborations

- Withdrawal from Psychiatric Medication
 - Review of the literature on safest ways to discontinue medication and various withdrawal effects of different classes of medication

News Team

 Review 5 articles every week that contribute to the counter-narrative that questions the current drug-based paradigm of care

Why Have a Researcher-Webzine Partnership?

In other words...

1. What is the problem? What gaps and limitations are preventing the public from accessing a broader range of discourses and options relating to mental and women's health?

2. Why is partnership part of the solution? How might specific partnerships between researchers and a progressive webzine (e.g. MIA) help to address these gaps?

Two different perspectives to take into account here:

Individual health consumer and academic researcher

Problems Facing Individual Reader/Consumer

Over availability of Misleading or Oppressive Discourse

- Public stigma and prejudice regarding mental difficulties
 - Menåtal difficulties=dangerous
 e.g. mass shootings
 - Suffering = weakness/unreliability
- Dominant narratives about mental difficulties:
 - pathological and unnatural
 - biologically/brain-based
 - "Expert" knows best

Under availability of Transparent and Non-Harming Discourse

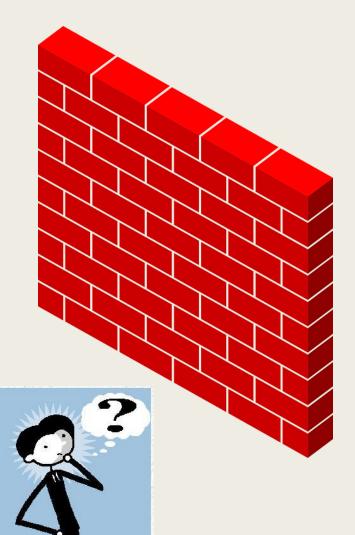
- Alternative research, narratives don't make it to mass audience
 - Drowned out by "noise" of mainstream messages
 - Overwhelming volume of information, options disorienting; don't know where to look
- Webzine becomes isolated bubble
 - Without formal research connection easily stereotyped and marginalized as "radical," lacking "credibility"
 - Challenging message may be threatening or alienating to typical newcomer out of context

Problems Facing Researcher

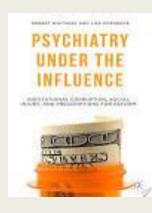
- Trapped within academic bubble of narrow specialization and abstract concerns, distanced from public
 - May not appreciate full range of lived experiences of "patients" studied
 - May not be fully aware of less mainstream, competing research
 - Not accustomed to translating research to be fully accessible for lay audience
 - Competing media and anonymity of audience = no way to know or ensure research is heard by those who most need it

Bottom Line:

Desperately wants to make a difference for target audience – but doesn't know how or where to reach them!!







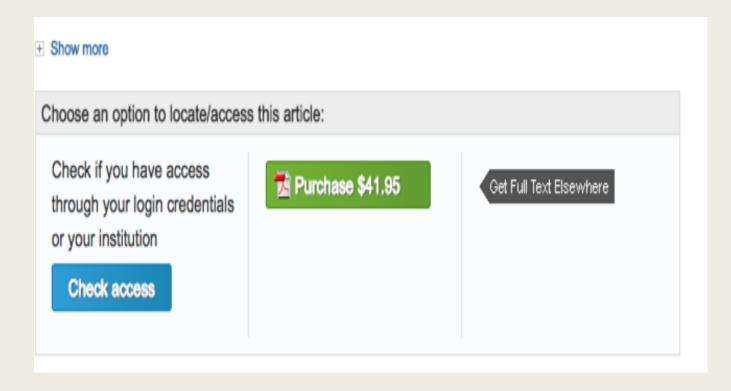




Limited Access To Information

Barriers to accessing high-quality, transparent, critical research:

1. Lack of free access to many key articles in research/academic journals



How Can Partnership Help?

Benefits go much deeper than just one-way transfer of information!!

Relationship between researcher and reader not unidirectional or hierarchical, reader not just passively receiving "knowledge." Instead:

VOICES FROM THE TEAMS AT UMASS & MIA

What drives the teams to do this work?

- Belief in the organizational mission
- Disseminate important information in layman's terms
- Do not align with the medicalization of suffering or the idea that we are puppets to our brain chemistry
- •Our articles (UMB team) get read by a LOT more people
- Learn from the community get to "know" some of then
- Helps with feelings of isolation when doing research that goes "against the grain"
- Personal experiences with mental health challenges

What does MIA make possible for the community of service users, providers and their loved ones?

- Dialogue between groups that often have one-way communication
- Space for lived experience "first person accounts"
- Space for practitioners/researchers who are critical of the medical paradigm of mental illness
- Gives people still in the "system" anonymity whilst voicing their experience
- Builds awareness for practitioners unaware of scientifically based critique
- Forums can be a place of support for people who have been harmed by psychiatry
- Represents a place where the "playing field can be leveled" between the service providers and utilizers – equalizes power

How does the work at MIA align with the social justice mission of UMass Boston?

- •Helps give visibility to alternative conceptualizations of helping e.g. the Healing Voices Network, Open Dialogue
- Voice of the "person suffering" can be heard
- Goes beyond the academic lens by working with a community agency
- Different form of activism
- •Research has a legacy of pulling away from people this gives it back to them (facilitated by comments section and blogs)

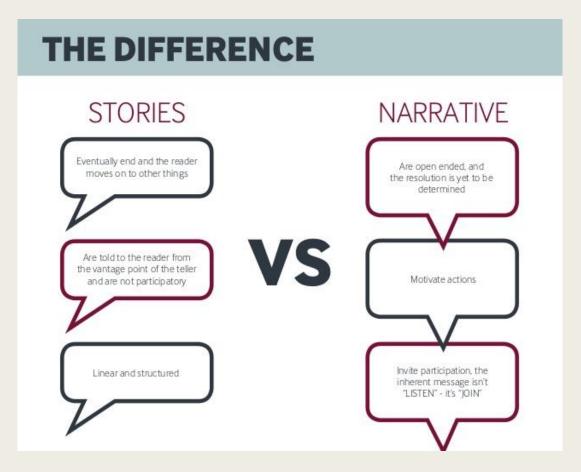
What are some of the challenges they've faced?

- Develop an "non" academic style of writing that works for providers and utilizers of services; quick turnaround
- Additional responsibility to critique the literature
- Finding articles that fit the narrative
- Dealing with business side of things as it grows
- Making sure content is always interesting and up-to-date
- Dealing with contentious or wayward comments or trolling
- •Figuring out what fits in our narrative or "the MIA brand" we have the potential to offend each other and our readers

STRATEGIES FOR DISSEMINATING CRITICAL RESEARCH

Creating a Context

- Frame article as an addition to an ongoing conversation or "story" about the developing science
 - Link back to previous articles



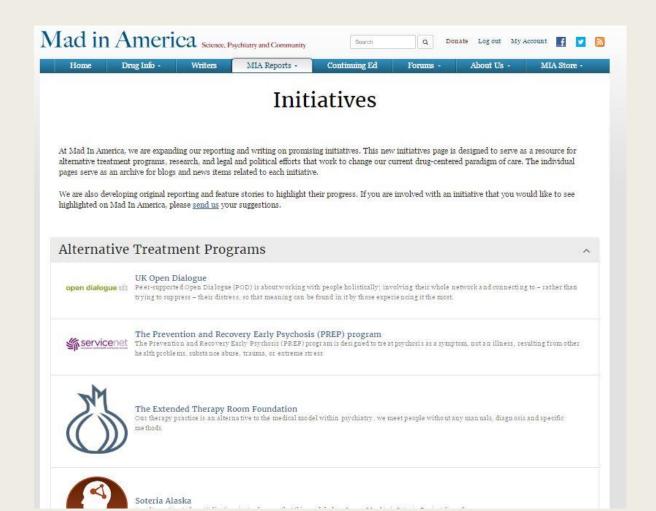
Creating a Context

Try to "peg" stories to current social and political events



Creating a Context

 Create ongoing projects or "Initiatives" to publish related reports under "umbrellas"



Strategies for Encouraging Dialogue

- Moderate comments
 - Require site account with associated email for comment privileges
 - Set clear moderation guidelines

- Honestly articulate your opinions and experiences. Your unique perspective is a welcome contribution to the issues discussed on the site.
- Keep comments civil. This includes refraining from posting personal
 attacks, threats, sarcasm, spamming, hyperbole, misrepresentations of
 oneself or others (including strawman arguments), illegal material,
 profanity, hate speech, disparaging assertions about a person's character,
 discrimination based on a person's identity or occupation, and calls for
 violence against any people. We ask for good faith and the benefit of the
 doubt in our effort to allow anybody who wants to join the dialogue to do
 so without fear of abuse. Please respond to and criticize ideas, not
 character.
- Honor differing viewpoints. This website intentionally brings together individuals with varying backgrounds and values. We believe civil, inclusive dialogue to be crucial to finding solutions to our current paradigm of mental health care.
- Remain relevant to the present article/topic. Off-topic comments are
 disruptive and derail the discussion. These may be removed by the
 moderator. Readers who wish to initiate a new conversation are invited to
 submit an Op-Ed blog. Keep self-promotion to a minimum and post no
 more than one link to your own website per comment. Please note that in
 most cases discussion of comment moderation in a thread is considered
 off-topic. Contact us directly to report problematic posts or offer
 feedback about moderation.
- Register your account with a valid email address. Email is how the
 moderator will get in touch with you if there are any issues with your
 comments. If it's impossible to contact you, you may not be able to
 continue posting on the site.

Strategies for Encouraging Dialogue

- Personalize authorship:
 - Encourage study authors to submit accompanying blogs or interviews
 - "About Us" section and Writer bios
 - Encourage authors to respond to comments

MIA News Team



Justin Karter
News Editor



Shannon Peters
Associate News Editor



Akansha Vaswani Associate News Editor