

Sharing is Caring: Community-Focused Research Communication

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Introduction

Community-based research requires close community relationships and collaboration. Oftentimes, community members benefit indirectly through scientific discovery via potential future applications, or (sometimes) directly through participant remuneration. As community-based researchers *and* community members, we know we can do better for the people we serve. One way we do this is through communicating our research activities and findings through “alternative” venues and media.

Below, we discuss how our lab has approached knowledge sharing outside of the academy as an outcome to research, and the way this sharing helps us to build and maintain our community relationships. The audience of this article is other academics. As such, we focus on the research benefits gained as a way to push back on the idea of this communication being extraneous or secondary to the research itself. We hope that this document will also help researchers to reflect on and formalize their knowledge-sharing process. We focus on processes to guide practitioners through applying this to their work.

Case studies and community-based work

Members of our research team have experience with varying levels of engagement within the communities they have worked with for various research projects. These levels of engagement vary depending on the research context, community needs, and the researchers’ relationship to the community.

For example, in some projects, we have had a lower level of engagement, but still produce knowledge useful to the community. In one such case, the researcher was not a part of the community, and the project was short-term. After the study, the researcher provided participants with a set of findings they could use in their work as teachers. Several participants asked her to make a more formal public version so that they could share it with others and discuss it at teaching conferences. She posted and shared a blog article¹ and left it to the community to use as needed. The project was never published in an academic setting, yet the community could apply the knowledge that they themselves had generated through the study.

Our recent survey on body doubling was presented to large neurodivergent communities outside the main author’s smaller ND network. Many respondents asked to see the results which will be presented as a blog with body doubling resources (as many had not heard the term before!) and in a digestible infographic. In these two examples, while research findings were reported and assimilated in a non-academic context, the outputs took considerably less time on the research team’s part.

For communities and projects that require a higher level of engagement between the researcher and the community, we, as researchers, choose to also have a more involved process for research communication. For example, in long-term research and ethnographic studies, a relationship is built and maintained (often over years) with the community. In working with the Autcraft community, a Minecraft community for autistic youth, frequent research communication was made through blog articles, social media posts, and forum posts. Further, talks and videos were created after several research papers had been published. In more current research with the BTS ARMY community, frequent social media posts, videos, and blog articles inform the community of current research. In both these cases, these research “updates”

¹ <https://medium.com/@leyabreanna/technology-for-teaching-orientation-and-mobility-30764d9eb308>

also served as a point of contact for the community and were often used to help further research and report on past research.

Our Alternative Research “Outcomes”

Besides academic publications, our research takes the form of the following outcomes:

- ★ Blogs: Our lab runs a blog on Medium to discuss our research. Blog posts deconstruct academic language, making them more accessible and easy to read. We also seek to be transparent about the research process with the communities we work closely with.
- ★ Videos: In the past, we have created TikTok and Youtube videos² that condense academic papers into bite-sized information to share on social media. Creators on these platforms often cite and discuss academic papers to engage in discourses. By making research easy/fun to digest we include more people in the discourse and reduce the labor required by people outside institutions to participate (e.g., paid articles).
- ★ Tweet Threads: One of the communities we work with thrives on social platforms such as Twitter. We regularly engage with the community through tweets³.

Benefits of bringing the work back to the community

As researchers who often work with communities we are a part of, the benefits of doing research and communicating it back seem intrinsically linked. We are motivated to do this because it helps our communities and in turn, helps us as a part of them. In the following two sections we highlight some benefits that researchers and community members might see regardless of whether the researchers are community members.

Community Benefits

Bring Joy and Insights. Reporting our research findings back to the community in understandable, digestible ways allows them to gain not only insights into themselves but also to celebrate their community. For example, using the “screener” question in a survey to create a community video about community members’ favorite community moments brought reflection and joyful celebration of those moments. This also benefits the researcher when community members are incentivized to participate in further research because of these interactions.

Diverting Resources. By having a better relationship with our communities, we can determine what these communities need most. Using alternative means for research dissemination brings attention to these communities (through journalism, virality, and other communities). We have seen communities use our work to legitimize their community practices and, in turn, ask for the resources they need from the public to keep their community going.

Researcher Benefits

Academic career growth tends to center on the number of papers submitted. While the research outcomes we talk about in this paper are important, they do take resources and energy (see the timeline presented in the next section). However, community members can help create and maintain content - authors don’t have to do *everything*. As discussed above our research can help validate things that the communities are already talking about and will continue to share. The authors hope that more career incentives will be created for this kind of translational work. For the time being, we want to communicate that there *are* career benefits to doing this work. By sharing your work more widely, you are more likely to be contacted for wider scientific

² <https://youtu.be/QVI8jrlPDh0>

³ <https://twitter.com/liltoveisARMY/status/1507936331619454983>,

<https://twitter.com/liltoveisARMY/status/1507936331619454983>,

<https://twitter.com/liltove/status/1513343701577134083>, <https://twitter.com/christyinkorean/status/1659230266022404104>

communication, furthering your career. This research team has been invited to do interviews with major news networks, podcasts, ted-style talks, and keynotes because of our dedication to community research translation, and being deeply involved community members ourselves. These efforts have helped us establish ourselves as researchers.

Many communities are skeptical of researchers because they have been burned in the past: feeling misrepresented or used. Spending the time to communicate intentions and findings through community content can contribute to trust building. Openly communicating with, advocating for, and finding ways to contribute to your communities in exchange for their knowledge sharing feels like a bare minimum for forming trusting, respectful relationships within communities. Better relationships mean better access and more meaningful research outcomes.

Pipeline for prioritizing scientific communication

Since (even before) the inception of our lab, we have had continuous conversations around care - both for each other as researchers and people and for the communities we work with⁴. A major part of community-based work, for us, is not only accurately representing the community in our work, but also building and maintaining these relationships. This includes disseminating our findings to the community in a digestible format with resources or other results. This is all to say that we have been working with community dissemination in mind from the start and often have conversations around best practices for this. A few questions to keep in mind along the way:

- Where will our research reach community members? Are they mainly active on Twitter, Facebook groups, subreddits, email listservs, community centers?
- What are typical communication practices and channels within this community? Is there a moderator/admin to start the conversation with? Look into the rules of engagement.
- Who is the audience for each piece of media and what terminology needs to be more explicitly stated vs. is well-known in the community?

As discussed above, sharing work back to communities is not explicitly rewarded within academic systems but is an important part of relationship building to prioritize our communities and not conducting extractivist research. Having systems in place and prioritizing science communication lessens the perceived time burden. The following general pipeline for scientific communication has been developed by Kate over years of community-focused work:

1. Relationship building (through interactions, engagement, and posts of informal nature)
2. Conducting the research and writing the academic publication
3. While publication is underway, writing the blog post for the community (also serves as a drafty script for conference presentations and other videos)
4. After camera-ready - Post blog and Twitter threads that concisely present research findings and point to relevant links (all the same content in different formats)
5. Ted talk/science talks
6. Key notes, other kinds of bigger picture talks/videos

This may seem like a lot but much of the content comes from the upfront work which is then reconfigured for the later stages. Integrating dissemination while papers are under review allows us to prepare for future presentations. Writing for different audiences is also good practice in communicating our work clearly and in plain language.

Closing

This work overall is a part of how we maintain our relationships with communities. Making materials for the community is a core outcome of working together as a lab. It is impossible to

⁴ <https://medium.com/misfitlabs/creating-a-lab-with-a-culture-of-care-2b19bb0b2a22>

capture all of our practices and aspirations in this document. Historically, research outcomes are wrapped up in paternal and colonial power dynamics, othering communities of study. While we have chosen to primarily focus on knowledge sharing, we urge the workshop attendees to consider more radical material, political, and social outcomes to their research. These can occur as primary outcomes or as side effects of your process (externalities). Material, social, and political outcomes and externalities could include (but are not at all limited to):

- ★ Lasting systems maintained by community
- ★ Community use of researcher resources (physical spaces, infrastructure, tools)
- ★ Payment
- ★ Archiving
- ★ Community organizing
- ★ Community events
- ★ Policy recommendations
- ★ Art showings, exhibits
- ★ Collectively built artifacts

We have been throwing around other potential venues to publish and share our work. We don't necessarily have the desire nor believe every researcher needs to be a social media influencer. However, given the popularity and short-form nature of platforms like Twitter and Tiktok, we see these as places to engage with our communities and share findings and resources. Other discussed areas include podcasts, ted talks, zines, alternative research collectives, and ResearchBytes.

We look forward to speaking with other researchers about their practices at this workshop and we are excited for the opportunity to learn from and speak with other workshop attendees. We would love to further discuss in the workshop the lack of priority given to this type of work. The extra labor that goes into science communication is often not part of career growth in a field that values ACM publications over virtually every other medium. Researchers and academics are already juggling too many tasks and asking them to do more work can lead to burnout, but we feel that conducting work without giving back to our communities in some way is extractive and unethical.

We are excited at the prospect of discussing these ideas and hearing how others are viewing alternative publications and handling outreach.

Please find our supplementary video at the following link: <https://youtu.be/h7qZ5OXF6pU>