

Flash Collectives: Creating Agile Strategies for Social Change

Brooklyn Community Pride Center, 2/28/14

Visual AIDS hosted an event, which brought together people primarily from Montreal Canada, and New York, USA to discuss current issues around HIV/AIDS and ways to mobilize. Because of the bi-national conversation, Canadian and USA experience at times divide the notes. The event was broken up into two parts, the warm up allowed the assembled people to climitize to the issues that would be mentioned but not discussed in the second half. This was so that those attending could at least have the opportunity to have a shared understanding of some current issues within the field of HIV/AIDS.



WARM UP

A brief discussion on PrEP, PEP and HIV Criminalization, examples, artist and activist Avram Finkelstein suggests of issues left on the battlefield of HIV/AIDS.

PrEP & PEP

PrEP and PEP involve taking antiretroviral medication to prevent the transmission of HIV.

- PEP (Post Exposure Prophylaxis) is taken within 72 hours AFTER exposure to HIV and consists of a month of treatment. If you think you have been exposed to HIV go to a hospital or see your doctor right away. Pep411.com

- PrEP (Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis) is a daily regimen, taken BEFORE exposure to HIV to reduce the chance of infection. Talk to a doctor to determine if PrEP is right for you. Prepfacts.org

Canadian Experience:

- PREP not yet approved
- PrEP trial in Montreal with 2000 people involved, some receiving placebo
- PEP is mostly covered by insurance

US Experience

- There is an unequal access to PEP and PrEP across the states and a huge cost discrepancy i.e. NY vs California

Person PEP PrEP experience: -

- Easily obtained; “however didn’t take it because of counseling session”
- “Took PEP twice; second time recommended PREP, ‘astonishingly easy to get’, for me the side effects were loss of appetite, vomiting bile”
- A lot of emergency rooms are not always knowledgeable about PEP/PREP [Mt. Sinai]
- AZT is still being used as an AIDS related drug. Why?
- Interesting to think about the connection between porn, bareback porn, PEP and PrEP
- A lot of people keep PrEP journals online

HIV CRIMINALIZATION

HIV criminalization makes behavior that is legal for people who do not have HIV, or don’t know they have it, illegal for HIV+ people. People with HIV are being arrested for having consensual sex and even for things like spitting on another person. 36 states and territories have HIV-specific criminal laws, but people with HIV also are being prosecuted for assault and other crimes under regular criminal laws. Most HIV “criminal transmission” or “criminal exposure” laws require HIV+ people to disclose their HIV status to their partners before having any kind of sex, but proving that you disclosed can be tough. These cases often boil down to one person’s word against the other’s. – from The Center for HIV Law and Policy

Canadian Experience:

- No HIV Criminalization laws per se, yet...
- Recent Supreme Court Ruling puts the burden of proof squarely on the person living with HIV even if there is not transmission
- Because there are no specific laws to be targeted, activists and advocate are instead focusing on sexual assault laws

USA Experience:

- Laws differ state by state, some states have HIV specific laws
- The harshest laws are in the west, with sentences ranging from 1 to 35 years
- The Sero Project works to educate people about HIV Criminalization and towards decriminalizing HIV

Overall

- There is a vagueness of laws—usual people are presumed guilty until proven innocent

- Disclosure is made more dangerous due to HIV Criminalization
- We know that HIV Criminalization does not reduce new cases of HIV
- We know HIV Criminalization increases stigma and has negative impact on public health

Media Training

- When we hearing stories about HIV on the news we need to ask why? What story is being told?
- When there is an HIV Criminalization story in the news we need to interrogate the facts being presented and assume HIVphobia bias

WARM UP THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- PEP/PREP and Imprisonment - Which *bodies* have access to PEP/PREP? And which bodies go to prison?
- What are all the ways that HIV/AIDS is wrapped up in the prison industrial complex?
- What really decreases HIV related stigma, really improves life changes for people living with and at real risk for HIV?
- In what ways have the successful gains of the past impacted the present? What is left on the battlefield and how do we approach the ongoing work?



PRESENTATIONS

Avram

- AIDS in the public sphere: silence=death
 - AIDS cultural conversations
 - Collaboration as a tool for complexity
 - Multiple brains that are curated to form collectivized action

- The legacy of the Silence=death posters: how do we get people to care in the present?
 - Not trying to create another silence=death
 - How do we sustain complex conversations in the public sphere?
 - The work as the point of collective// rather than institutional logo-ing/etc:
 - Using the institution as resource but not as crux
- Flash Collectives
 - 1 day collective to *cut to the chase*
 - Content as the question not the delivery system
- Workshop: “Fuck Laws”
 - 9-4 w/lunch break
 - Started with a great HIV Criminalization Teach in Mind Map!
 - 2 brainstorm sessions (text_image)
 - start working: look what’s possible
 - Produced: buttons/ projected billboards/ postcards/ tumblr
- Some Tips:
 - Conversations: a curated mix of disciplines
 - Computer resources
 - Name tags in order to dive in



Mary

- Space makes a difference
- The day was made better through the use of a state of the art room that included the possibility of projecting “living notes” during the workshop
- It is important to keep the group together
- In favor of complete consensus: agree to listen

Ian

- Setting the terms before hand was important
 - People were required to stay all day and confirm attendance
 - Those in the group were selected from known communities, and choices were made to ensure specific strengths were represented and different points of view
- Outcomes were pre-determined to a degree, with potential production needs accounted for
- Pre-Planning was key
- Be open to modification

Jenny

- Biggest takeaway: space w/so many resources is vital
- Take advantage of institutions w/o necessarily creating institutionalized work
- People were “curated” which lead to us having access to a button maker// mapping words// word trails pertaining to criminalization
- *“Don’t let it become too complex that you get overwhelmed”*
- Things to think about when creating messaging: “What does the general public know? What is the general public?”

Josh:

- One of the premises of the day was that we would set political differences aside and not let ourselves get bogged down in fighting over details. And it was very productive. But how much of this was due to the fact that we were aiming for an introductory-level pamphlet?
 - As we move forward on different projects that have more complex analyses, can we still just set try to politics aside or will those differences just manifest in different ways?
- We had a very effective day creating and producing the materials, but since then have been less effective at the actual distribution of the work.
 - Can the flash collective model be applied to the distribution side of activism as well, or is it structurally-biased towards creation?
- Working under the imperative to JUST DO SOMETHING got us off our asses and got things done. But again...
 - as we move forward and start new projects, how do we ensure that these fit into a larger strategy and into a larger movement?

Notes: Nicholas Von Kleist

Photos: Christopher Conry

Links:

Brooklyn Community Pride Center

lgbtbrooklyn.org

Sero Project

seroproject.com

Fuck Laws

fucklaws.tumblr.com

