Getting to the Heart of Recycling

Exploring the role of emotions in recycling attitudes and motivations

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Agenda

- The emotional response to waste
- Aspen survey responses
- Exploring waste and emotion
  - Fear, Shame, Powerlessness
  - Hope, Trust, Empowerment
- Utilizing emotions in recycling participation
“Waste frightens us.”
- Kevin Lynch (1990)

- Waste triggers shame and fear
- Waste is associated with lower social status
- Waste appears beyond our control
- Waste can be hazardous

Aris Prawaba – “death by the waste”

“Recycling is very important for our future”
City of Aspen citizen (2019)

- Recyclers believe recycling
  - Protects future generations
  - Conserves resources

- Recycling participation creates positive emotional responses
  - Happy
  - Empowered
  - Responsible

Vik Muniz
“Pictures of Garbage - Mother and child”

City of Aspen Recycle Center Survey (2019)

- Escalating costs of public drop off center
- Council asked for public input
- Surveyed community for 3 months (March - May 2019)
  - In person
  - Online
  - Mail

93% asked to keep center open
Survey Respondents by RGRC Use Type

- Personal Use: 271 (64%)
- Business Use: 23 (5%)
- Personal and Business Use: 95 (22%)
- Do Not Use the RGRC: 37 (9%)

426 Total Survey Respondants
Aspen Community Response

- 282 total written comments
- Sample comments:

PLEASE KEEP THE RECYCLING FACILITY OPEN!!

Please do not take it away!

We love it!

I LOVE THIS PLACE!!

This facility is cherished!

![Graph showing emotional language in comments]
Emotions and recycling choices

Negative emotions:
• Fear
• Shame
• Powerlessness

Positive emotions:
• Hope
• Trust
• Empowerment

Elgaied (2012); Meneses (2010); O’Connell (2011);
Burying waste echoes human burial

1000 years of shells in Maine, USA

Modern landfill in Pennsylvania, USA
Burying our dead is part of the human tradition

Ancient gravesite in Egypt
Arne Hodalic/National Geographic

Ute Cemetery, Aspen
Waste, shame, and denial

- People who work with waste suffer from negative stigmatization
  (Gutberlet & Jayme, 2010)

- Waste is concealed from view.
  (Hawkins, 2006, Royte, 2005)
Recycling and confusion (powerlessness)
Waste can be hazardous

Waste collection industry is listed in the federal government’s list of 10 most dangerous jobs (SWANA, 2019)
Recycling offers hope

Wildwood School field trip to recycle center
Fostering trust

Mierle Laderman Ukele
“Touch sanitation” -1970-1980
Utilizing emotions in recycling participation

Aspen Middle School students’ cable collection

Aspen Earth Day Commitment ‘Tree’
Waste Musicians

http://www.junkmusic.org/index.php

Donald Knaack


Bash the Trash

The Junksters

http://www.usl.org.uk/
Empowering people to act

Eliminating confusion and establishing trust around recycling programs improves public participation.

(DeFeo & DeGisi, 2010; Fahy, 2005)
Noble & Webster - “Dirty White Trash” (1998)

Transforming interactions with waste.
Contact

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References


Featured Artists’ websites

- http://arisprabawa.wordpress.com
- http://www.tomdeiningerart.com/works.html
- http://www.usl.org.uk/
- http://www.vikmuniz.net/