

*The Paradox of Realism
in exposing students to ex-addict*

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A popular part of many anti-drug interventions is the inclusion of a play, movie and other ways of edutainment (Sood, Menard, & Witte, 2004). A previous study (Guttman, Gesser-Edelsburg & Israelashvili, 2008) indicated

The Paradox of Realism problem

the ***MORE AUTHENTIC*** the drama is the ***LESS*** would it be perceived as ***RELEVANT*** by those who have never experienced drugs and/or the ***MORE*** would it be perceived as ***LEGITIMATING*** by those who have already used it.

Thus, an "authentic" drama might lead all viewers to experience a strong emotional experience, yet for some it might be perceived as irrelevant while for others it might be perceived as encouraging drug use.

The current study explored the possibility of *The Paradox of realism* existence in adolescents' meeting with ex-addicts.

The study questions were:

1. How do they perceive the meeting? (Authentic? Enriching?)
2. What change does it make in adolescents' attitudes toward drug abuse, drug occasional users, drug addicts and drug ex-addicts?

Participants

293 10th graders, learning in six Israeli high-schools, met 6 ex-addicts who described their past and present life. The students' perceptions of substance abuse were anonymously measured before and after they viewed the drama. Using their answers to "Background information" (e.g., gender, birth place; birth order) successful matching of pre=post answers were identified for 182 participants (62%)

Procedure

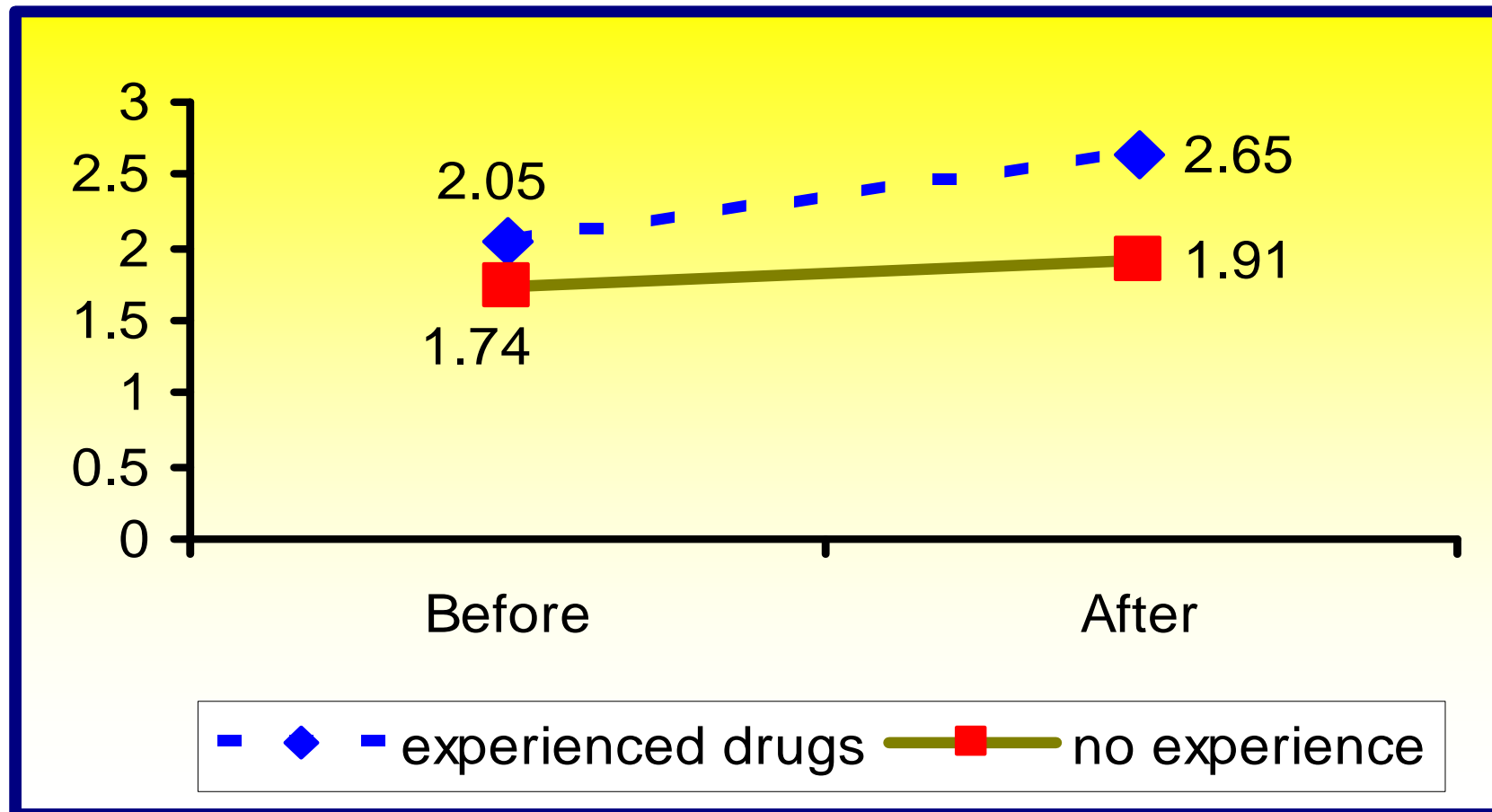
Prior to meeting the students, the ex-addicts had no preliminary instruction, neither regarding the content of their talk nor regarding the way to make their presentation. Nevertheless all the six of them made very similar presentations.

These presentations included (in a sequential order):

A description of one's past "wealthy" life... the first "naïve" exposure to drugs... the rapidly growing exposure to drugs... becoming an addicted... having miserable life... including unbelievable negative acts... a personal decision to stop using drugs... overcoming the addiction... much happier life.

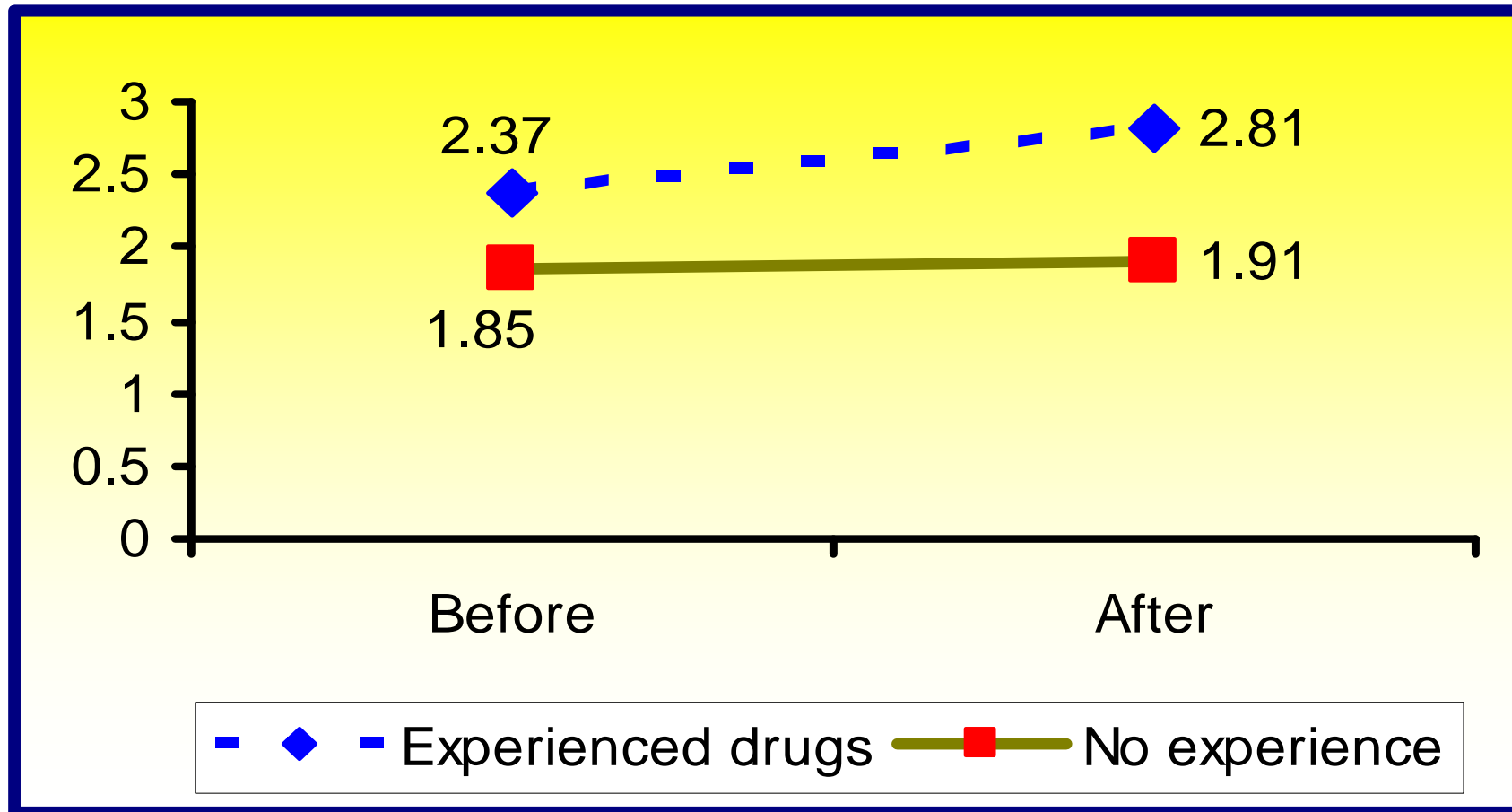
Interaction effect of past experience with drugs and Time, on attitude toward occasional drug users (N=182)

(Higher Mean = More favorable attitude)



Interaction effect of past experience with drugs and Time, on intention to use drugs in the future (N= 182)

(Higher Mean = More intention)



**9th & 10th graders attitudes *Before vs. After*
participation in a meeting with Ex-Addict (N=182)**

% of agreement with the statement...	<i>Before</i>	<i>After</i>
I am eager to experience drugs	10.4	14.8
I won't use Cannabis because it might lead me to use other drugs	62.1	53.2
I am afraid of being addicted to drugs	58.7	59.3
Occasional users are at-risk for addiction	70.8	60.9
Drug addict can not stop it	64	31.3
Everyone can recover from drug addiction	47.2	39.5

Conclusions

A meeting with ex-addict might lead to an increase in readiness to use drugs. This is true especially for those who have already explored drugs. These findings are in line with *The Paradox of Realism* assumptions.

Implications

- A meeting with an ex-addict should not be conducted unless a preliminary preparation of the adolescents has been made, followed by a group discussion on "how to interpret" the ex-addict presentation.
- This process should take place with regard to various risk behavior.
- Universal prevention might have short-range negative implications on those who are in-need for indicative or selective preventive intervention.

References:

- Guttman, N., Gesser-Edelsburg, A., & Israelashvili, M. (2008). The Paradox of Realism and "Authenticity" in Entertainment-Education: A Study of Adolescents' Views about Anti-Drug Abuse Dramas. *Health Communication, 23*, 128-141
- Sood, S., Menard, T., & Witte, K. (2004). The theory behind entertainment education. In A. Singhal, M. J. Cody, E. M. Rogers, & M. Sabido (Eds.), *Entertainment-education and social change* (pp. 117–145). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.