



Personal information on the author

First Name: **Sylvia**

Last Name: **Thyssen**

Position: **Managing Editor**

Organisation: **Erowid Center**

Most important career path

Ms. Thyssen has over 15 years of experience in non-profit management, data collection and analysis, and publishing. As Managing Editor of Erowid since 2001, her focus has been on raising awareness of how the language used to describe psychoactive drugs and experiences can deeply affect the thoughts and actions of others, with a significant impact on individual and societal understandings of drug use, misuse, and abuse.

Title of presentation

Experience Counts: Research Chemical Self-Reports on Erowid.org

Description of the contribution

The global research chemical phenomenon has only come to exist since the explosion of digital communication technologies. Today, anyone with full access to the Internet can feel like a participatory member of a drug culture featuring a constant stream of new materials, new packaging, and new ways of gray marketing that seem to keep one step ahead of law enforcement. The long-term health effects of these substances are unknown, and some products have been associated with deaths or lasting neurological problems and highly addictive effects. Confusing and sometimes conflicting data create a challenging arena for researching the health issues related to these compounds.

The Internet abounds with self-reports describing the subjective effects of users' experiences with novel chemicals. Aside from documenting acute adverse events, self-reports offer an opportunity for information sharing prior to someone becoming a casualty. Since 1996, Erowid.org has been at the forefront of online publishing about research chemicals for which little information is otherwise coherently available. With over 10 million visitors per year, Erowid.org's reputation for reliable, non-judgmental reporting places it at a crossroads between users of novel psychoactive substances and public health efforts. This presentation will cover the ten-year evolution of the Erowid Experience Vaults as a vehicle for information related to risk reduction and health concerns vis-à-vis psychoactive substances, including over 65 so-called research chemicals. The history, philosophy and practical challenges of collecting, reviewing, and categorizing a large number of first-person reports will be discussed.