

**Media Drug Prevention and Public Service**  
**Advertising:**  
**Evaluating The National Youth Anti-Drug Media**  
**Campaign**

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**ABSTRACT:**

This work presents a thorough qualitative analysis of the content and nature of the National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign (NYADMC), in order to gain insight into the effectiveness of that endeavour. This is achieved through a discussion of the origins and the mission of the campaign, and the aims and perspective of the various private and federal organizations pivotal in the administrative process. A thorough discussion of the evaluation of the campaign and ones similar, as well as presentation of communication theories dealing with the subject of health-oriented public service advertising sets the methodology for the bulk content analysis of a cross-section of the ads themselves.

The end result of this investigation leads the author to believe that not only were most of the ads broadcast during the course of the campaign since 1997 not effective in reducing teen use and perception, as the ONDCP funded Westat and Annenberg studies themselves have shown, but that based on public advertising research, the ads for the most part failed to engage audiences in a way which would have been most constructive for the message of drug prevention.

**PURPOSE STATEMENT:**

The purpose of this work is to conduct an evaluation of the National Media Campaign heralded by Office of National Drug Control Policy and the Partnership for a Drug Free America in the media component of drug prevention, and the general so called “War on Drugs.” A thorough analysis of the PSA work, the sponsorship and leadership of the two organizations and their general policy objectives, contrasted with the

effectiveness research of media prevention efforts will demonstrate the achieved success of this wide range campaign, and its tactics, as well as the ideological conflicts which come into play in the form of agenda setting and content development.

The media spotlight has contributed to the anti-drug campaign to be seen as product promotion, based on marketing rather than worthwhile and effective public health policy, and the effects of such have created a potential rift between the intent and the outcome. The promotion of the ‘Anti-Drug,’ a Partnership for a Drug Free America’s staple, as a concept, is an example of this, and there are numerous instances where the campaign is defined or described in marketing terms. For just as advertisements sell products, the PSA’s purpose is to *unsell* them: “any adman will concede that even the best campaign can’t succeed without having a good product to sell, and abstinence from drugs is certainly a great product.”<sup>1</sup>

However, the facts seem to suggest that this campaign, and others like it, seek to uphold the ideology of the current war on drugs, rather than effectively prevent youth drug consumption and abuse, despite communication theories which seem to provide effective solutions. This conjecture is evidenced by the reluctance on the part of the PSA creators to use more controversial truth-oriented methods, teaching social resistance techniques, and engaging an open dialogue which does justice to the complex forces involved in the nature of youth drug use. Rather, the campaign still focuses primarily scare tactic methods which have been proven to be most overused and overemphasized, generating little if any long term behavior change.<sup>2</sup> These numerous issues and concerns

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<sup>1</sup> Levine, “Don’t Fry Your Brain.” Forbes. 1991

<sup>2</sup> Crano, Burgoon. 2002; National Research Council, 2001

form the groundwork of this analysis and will be further developed during the course of this project.

#### PREFACE:

As an information-based society, we live, work, vote, and raise our children in a deeply entrenched television culture. In fact, most Americans are enlightened on the workings of politics and policy via the mass media channels, television in particular. The daily broadcast is where we learn what the greatest threats facing our society are, as well as the appropriate ways in which those threats may be addressed. The manner in which the media frame issues at hand is, for the most part, the way in which we too will come to interpret the problem. When it comes to one of the biggest culture wars of our time- that of the War on Drugs, television is where most of us learn about the current policies, the risks, the dangers, and the history and scapegoats on the subject. Specifically, topics include the origins of drugs, what sorts of maladies they reap on the societal fabric, who is to blame, and most importantly, how this serious problem can be eliminated.

Television is no doubt influential on a myriad of levels, it is a socializing medium which fosters an acceptance of the television-presented reality.<sup>3</sup> However, it is not the only medium that forms our perceptions, where personal life experience, for example, may be far more convincing. Furthermore, our most ubiquitous information media channel does not always provide its audience with a clear, unequivocal message. This is why public service advertising is crucial for the success of any widespread public knowledge campaign, and the drug abuse/prevention issue is where a great deal of public service advertising in this country is aimed. Whether teaching younger children who have not yet been exposed to drugs about making the right decision, or compelling

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<sup>3</sup> *The Cultivation Theory of George Gerbner.* <http://www.colostate.edu/Depts/Speech/rccs/theory06.htm>  
accessed 04/15/03

regular users to stop, drug prevention public service advertising, anti-drug PSA's, have been quite pervasive in the public service sector. Anti-drug advertising has had an active part from the very beginning, from the creation of the Media-Advertising Partnership for a Drug Free America in 1986, the formation of the Anti-Drug Parents' Movement in 1976, and the official declaration of the war on drugs by then President Nixon in 1971. Of course the perception of drugs as a social scourge has existed in this country for numerous decades previous, dating back to prohibition and Henry Anslinger's personal propaganda campaign against marijuana in the 1930's.<sup>4</sup>

The Ad Council, being on the foreground of public service advertising in the U.S., took up the fight of youth drug prevention under its wing, while the creation of Media-Advertising Partnership, later to be dubbed simply the Partnership for a Drug Free America (PDFA) rose out of the media-hyped crack/cocaine crisis in the mid-1980's, and with large media and corporate backing quickly became the foremost anti-drug advertiser.<sup>5</sup> These two influential organizations have remained the vanguard of anti-drug public service advertising.

The latest installment of drug prevention public service came about in 1997 in the form of the National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign, to be identified as the National Campaign from here on in. With a Congress-approved \$1 billion budget, a shift to a younger target group, and the incorporation of numerous multimedia features, this unprecedented mass media effort promised to be the most pervasive and most effective, in terms of getting youth to abstain from use, in the 30 year history of drug prevention PSA's, enlisting both donated and paid media time to further heighten the campaign's

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<sup>4</sup> *Marijuana and the Drug War*. [http://www.marijuana.bdtzone.com/marijuana\\_drug\\_war.asp](http://www.marijuana.bdtzone.com/marijuana_drug_war.asp) last accessed 03/31/03

<sup>5</sup> *Shoemaker, 1989; Buchanan, Wallack, 1998; National Research Council, 2001*

visibility. The specific content, strategy, and effect of this campaign will be the focus of this work.

Being the largest anti-drug advertiser, PDFFA would have seemed a likely candidate for such analysis, however the National Campaign enlists taxpayer dollars, and the significance of such a program also includes the fact that it is the first and only nation-wide public health/public service effort which the federal government has involved itself with. I was surprised to discover that outside of promoting the Census, and army recruitment, anti-drug advertising is the only type of social issue which attracts involvement and unilateral support on the federal level, and the Media Campaign is a direct representative of such involvement. To determine the scope and means of such an effort, and to uncover the reasons behind it would ascribe a significant amount about both about the state of public service advertising, and the state of the drug war in this country- no small feat.

During the course of this work, I aim to provide a brief history and purpose of public service broadcasting and advertising, as well as focus on the television spots themselves, through an analysis of the specific goals, purposes, and strategies of anti-drug PSA's. A detailed description of the process by which PSA's are produced and consequently aired will be outlined, as well as the background information on the sponsors and non-profit organizations heralding the Media Campaign and PSA's in general. A content analysis of the PSA's themselves will assess the messenger, the target audience, and the message itself in terms of the tactics involved, and the efficacy of those tactics based on research and communication theory. Finally, the effects of the PSA's will be presented, based on independent research and results presented by the Partnership.

Policy issues, and the effect of government sponsorship will also be taken into consideration. Furthermore, in light of the ideology behind the general sphere of the war on drugs, a thorough analysis of the policy of the campaign, and others like it, will be made. Most importantly, I would like to assess the effectiveness of the mass media campaign, within the backdrop of an ideological cultural war, and how it has influenced the policy and practice of drug prevention.

## II

### HISTORY AND PURPOSE

To begin, the merits or downfalls of the Media Campaign cannot be determined without first unearthing the background of the public service broadcasting sector. The historical Communications Act of 1934 set many broadcasting standards that are in effect to this day. The most significant piece of that legislation, though greatly diminished over the years of increased corporate media control, was the public service obligation that “required broadcast stations to serve the public good in exchange for the use of the public airwaves.”<sup>6</sup> Public service announcements, or PSA’s, aimed at the general public through the mass media channels, were heralded in the wake of the World War II effort by the War Advertising Council. The Ad Council, the present day descendant of that same organization, took upon itself multiple public advertising campaigns, such as the cause of environmental protection, the most famous of which is Smokey Bear ads, to AIDS prevention; yet even those far removed public service strategies had their origins in the war propaganda efforts.<sup>7</sup> The Ad Council remains the country’s most prolific

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<sup>6</sup> *Crano, Burgoon, page 264*

<sup>7</sup> *Ad Council website. [http://www.adcouncil.org/campaigns/historic\\_campaigns/](http://www.adcouncil.org/campaigns/historic_campaigns/) last accessed 02/22/03*

national public service media organization, with over 40 ongoing public media objectives.

#### THE FUNCTION OF PUBLIC SERVICE ADVERTISING:

Public service advertising is the most evident component of public service media which commercial stations are required to air by law. PSA's are the non-profit's sector answer to the corporate commercial.<sup>8</sup> Whereas corporate advertising sells products, PSA's sell behavior, especially when aimed at the public good. Because of the large target audience and the widespread appeal of the message, mass media is the ideal channel of transmission. According to Ad Council necessitated qualifications, public service announcements must come from a public or private non-profit source, with non-partisan, non-commercial content;<sup>9</sup> they provide the public with socially conscious, informative messages. The fact that most PSA work is done pro-bono (free of charge), though the National Media Campaign would come to provide a powerful exception, furthermore separates PSA's from average commercial advertising.

The majority of PSA campaigns focus on health-oriented topics or other significant social issues, such as gun control, child abuse, and literacy. Aimed at changing public opinion, the goal of a PSA is to be an impetus for social change through educating the public on the issue at hand. Public health campaigns in particular are intended to be straightforward, suggesting a single specific modification of behavior- i.e. quitting smoking, or wearing a condom to prevent the spread of AIDS and STD's.

However, before the first major public health campaigns ever got under way, media

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<sup>8</sup> *McCall*. Family Relations. 1983

<sup>9</sup> *Ad Council – How To Become An Official Campaign*. [http://www.adcouncil.org/about/How\\_To\\_Official/](http://www.adcouncil.org/about/How_To_Official/) last accessed 02/23/03

communication research had demonstrated the limited role such advertising could play in significantly influencing behavior, without comprehensive education and other forms of persuasion.<sup>10</sup>

Sometimes thought of as social marketing, thanks to the integration of marketing methods in the process of creation of PSA's, the widespread social scope of the message goes beyond mere product promotion, as "any persuasive health campaign is embedded in a larger set of social and political notions about healthy behavior."<sup>11</sup> The central point of public service advertising revolves around that particular idea of health. PSA's are usually paid for with public or donated monies, with not-for-profit media and advocacy organizations such as the Ad Council producing most of the national campaigns. *Federal* public service sponsorship, however, has only ever been attributed to one major social issue, the subject of which forms the basis of this work.

#### ANTI-DRUG PSA's

PSA's dealing with drug issues make up a majority of all current public service media campaigns, encompassing the most media visibility, especially on television. There are numerous approach strategies when it comes to anti drug public service ads. From scare tactics to focus on community prevention, the message of drug use deterrence has taken many forms. The general goal of these mass media campaigns is to change the norms of drug use, while discrediting any contrary pro-drug messages. In the media offensive of the so called war on drugs, such PSA's are part of the demand reduction

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<sup>10</sup> Crano, Burgoon, page 24

<sup>11</sup> Crano, Burgoon, page 29

strategy, along with treatment options and law enforcement.<sup>12</sup> Anti-drug ads demonstrate the negative consequences of drug use, positive aspects of refraining from use, and attempt to teach skills to resist use. They aim to convince users to stop using, prevent non-users from taking up the habit, and inspire members of the community to act in drug prevention efforts, such as mentor-a-child drives.

These are the aims of these media messages, however, what the message manages to get across, depends just as much upon the manner in which it is delivered, as upon what was meant by the messenger. In order to fully understand the true significance of these messages, many of its aspects will have to be analyzed. To begin, it is essential to ascertain where the bulk of the televised ads originate.

### III

#### PARTNERSHIP FOR A DRUG FREE AMERICA

While the Ad Council is the largest producer of all PSA's in the United States, PDFA is undeniably the nation's leader in anti-drug public service advertising. First known to the public domain as the Media-Advertising Partnership for a Drug-Free America, the Partnership formed in 1986 at the height of the media crack/cocaine panic.<sup>13</sup> PDFA, much like the Ad Council, is a non-partisan, non-profit organization made up of communication professionals from the media and business sectors. The advertising sector had a particularly important part in the creation of PDFA, especially since the American Association of Advertising Agencies provided the preliminary funds for jumpstarting the organization, and to this day the advertising roots are deeply entrenched

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<sup>12</sup> National Research Council. *Page 209*

<sup>13</sup> *Buchanan, Wallack. Journal of Drug Issues. 1998*

in what PDFFA is working to achieve.<sup>14</sup> The implications of this ancestry are certainly important to consider in evaluating PDFFA's efforts and will not be ignored.

“Each year in America, millions of children are faced with a decision -- a decision about using drugs. Our job is to help children make the right choice,” PDFFA proclaims on its website. Although this goal makes sense in light of the work performed by PDFFA, the purpose statement does not outline any specific strategy, but it is undoubtedly focused upon public opinion steering/manipulation. More specifically, this goal is to “help kids and teens reject substance abuse by influencing attitudes through persuasive information.”<sup>15</sup> Such is the self-stated the mission of the Partnership.

The bulk of the work done for PDFFA comes in the form of volunteer efforts,<sup>16</sup> while a twenty-five member creative team consisting of various advertising professionals make up the appraisal committee for submitted PSA's, only about 2 out of 10 of which are accepted.<sup>17</sup> Over the years the Partnership has doubtless shifted in terms of favored techniques and specificity of its message, nevertheless the organization has received much criticism for exaggeration and distortion of fact, something which will be elaborated upon in subsequent sections.

Since its fruitful beginnings in 1986, PDFFA has produced over 600 anti-drug ads, making it the largest producer of anti-drug spots in the nation.<sup>18</sup> The production of ads for PDFFA is done with marketing concepts in mind- through market segmentation and image-oriented advertising and are aimed at a core of eight specific target groups, though

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<sup>14</sup> PDFFA website [www.drugfreeamerica.org](http://www.drugfreeamerica.org) last accessed 03/04/03

<sup>15</sup> PDFFA website [www.drugfreeamerica.org](http://www.drugfreeamerica.org)

<sup>16</sup> PDFFA website [www.drugfreeamerica.org](http://www.drugfreeamerica.org)

<sup>17</sup> Levine. Forbes. 1991

<sup>18</sup> PDFFA website. [www.drugfreeamerica.org](http://www.drugfreeamerica.org)

kids, teenagers in particular, remain number one on the list, followed by parents and other adults.<sup>19</sup>

Being a non-partisan, private group, despite the collaboration with ONDCP through the Media Campaign, PDFFA's funds come entirely from private sources, for better or worse. The Partnership's current budget is about \$8.5 million,<sup>20</sup> which is raised in the form of donations from various agencies, foundations, and corporations. Because a significant portion of the donations used to come from alcohol and tobacco companies, the Partnership's credibility came under fire. Since receiving a \$7.5 million donation from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (whose endowment comes from the drug company Johnson & Johnson) in 1994, the Partnership ceased to accept donations from tobacco and alcohol manufacturers, and proudly states so on its website. Yet one of the strongest critiques of the Partnership's aims comes in direct light of the tight financial association of legal drugs with the loudest national voice against those which are illegal.<sup>21</sup> In addition, "the incessant attempts of the PDFFA to discredit cannabis use while ignoring the established dangers of alcohol and nicotine highlight that advertising organization's suspect credibility."<sup>22</sup>

Even before the implementation of the National Media Campaign, the Partnership hit its goal of \$1 million of donated ad time per day, which comparatively puts PDFFA second only to McDonald's in daily advertising dollars, of course PDFFA advertising is far less visible or pervasive than that of McDonald's, but it is nonetheless an intriguing detail. In addition to working to change adult and youth attitudes on

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<sup>19</sup> *Buchanan, Wallack. Journal of Drug Issues. 1998*

<sup>20</sup> *Crain. Crain's Chicago Business. 2002*

<sup>21</sup> *Buchanan, Wallack. Journal of Drug Issues. 1998*

<sup>22</sup> *Paul DuBay. JAMA 1992*

substance abuse, PDFA also conducts research to track the effect their advertising has on actual drug attitudes, in an effort to evaluate their work.<sup>23</sup>

## OFFICE OF NATIONAL DRUG CONTROL POLICY

Created via the efforts of the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988,<sup>24</sup> which established the eradication of drug abuse from the American society as an overarching public policy goal, the White House Office for National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) was born. As the name implies, the Office is a component of the Executive branch, and is charged with the production and implementation of a national strategy on drug abuse, with numerous priorities in the field- “The goals of the program are to reduce illicit drug use, manufacturing, and trafficking, drug-related crime and violence, and drug-related health consequences.”<sup>25</sup> The National Drug Control Strategy, set up by the same office, creates guidelines for the program, as well as for the cooperation of various state and federal agencies related to its purpose, including budgeting responsibilities. The establishment of this overarching agency called for a new federal position- that of the director of the ONDCP, the Drug Czar, the title of which has interesting implications for the nature of work the office conducts. John P. Walters, the nation’s 4<sup>th</sup> Drug Czar, currently holds that position, and his duties include the coordination of both international and U.S. anti-drug campaigns, and evaluation of those efforts, as well as advising the President on anti-drug effort strategies.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Buchanan, Wallack. *Journal of Drug Issues*. 1998

<sup>24</sup> *Bill Summary & Status for the 100th Congress* <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/z?d100:HR05210;TOM:/bss/d100query.html> last accessed 03/04/03

<sup>25</sup> *About ONDCP* <http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov/about/index.html> last accessed 03/04/03

<sup>26</sup> *ONDCP website* [www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov](http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov)

Because of the extensive funding and regulatory authority of the ONDCP, it is an incredibly powerful organization. It was the ONDCP, after all, that was charged with the responsibility of enacting the Media Campaign, and which is still in control of the media drug prevention effort. Specifically, the ONDCP's "principal drug control-goal," as of 1998, seeks to "educate sixty-eight million children about illegal drugs and enable them to reject such drugs."<sup>27</sup> This goal was to be attained through the implementation of the National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign.

Active participation by the ONDCP in the anti-drug PSA campaign, and the sizeable increase in ad visibility have certainly contributed to the campaign being criticized much more vociferously, particularly because government organizations are viewed as much more accountable for any direct action they take, compared to those unrelated to federal activity. Whether governmental involvement could have affected the credibility and effectiveness of the National Campaign is very difficult to ascertain, particularly due to the unprecedented scope of the current program. Yet, because this is the first time the ONDCP has been involved in such a widespread prevention initiative, its influence should at the very least be taken into consideration.

## NATIONAL YOUTH ANTI-DRUG MEDIA CAMPAIGN

Unveiled in 1998 through Congress approved funding, the Media Campaign was and still is the largest anti-drug media effort nationwide.<sup>28</sup> It is, in the words of ONDCP upon the program's unveiling, "the largest and most complex social marketing campaign

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<sup>27</sup> Gen. McCaffrey, Barry (drug czar) Vital Speeches. 1998

<sup>28</sup> "In 1998, with bipartisan support and through the efforts of the Congress and the President, ONDCP created the National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign, a multi-dimensional effort to educate and empower youth to reject illicit drugs." [www.mediacampaign.org](http://www.mediacampaign.org)

ever undertaken.”<sup>29</sup> The targets of the Campaign are children ages 9-18 (although the specific target age group fluctuated during the course of the campaign), and their parents, who are to be reached through various media channels. However, this evaluation will focus primarily on the television spots, seeing as how a full 85% of the funding is allocated for the purpose of buying ad time on network television.<sup>30</sup> Efforts to engage youth were split about even with those targeting parents and caretaker/role-models.<sup>31</sup>

Bringing the combined efforts of PDFA and ONDCP to a broader scope on the national level is supplemented by working with various local and other associations, from civic groups to non-profits and faith-based organizations across the country.<sup>32</sup> The campaign’s aggressive advertising goal was to ensure that those individuals responsible for influencing the choice of drug use in kids and teens, including the teens themselves, could be educated and swayed by exposure to an average of four anti-drug ads per week.<sup>33</sup> In effect, NYADMC has been regarded an anti-drug social engineering experiment, seeing as how it was the first campaign of its kind to incorporate paid advertising, as well as influencing media channels and community coalitions.

Campaign implementation was initially broken up into three distinct phases. Beginning with the pilot program initiated during Phase I, twelve cities were chosen to participate in the program, spanning January through July of 1998 using previously produced ads from PDFA. Phase II consisted of opening up the campaign on a nationwide scale, the launch of Campaign related web sites, and reports were established with various local and governmental organizations. Several new ads were added, with a

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<sup>29</sup> 106<sup>th</sup> Congress session. p.60

<sup>30</sup> 106<sup>th</sup> Congress session. 2000

<sup>31</sup> Summary of the NYADMC <http://www.mediacampaign.org/publications/summary/contents.html>

<sup>32</sup> <http://www.mediacampaign.org/about/index.html> last accessed 03/05/03

<sup>33</sup> Online National Media Campaign brochure <http://www.mediacampaign.org/about/brochure/trends.html>

complete switch over to new spots in the transition to Phase III, the final implementation of the Campaign.<sup>34</sup>

#### IV

##### COMMUNICATION THEORIES ON MEDIA EFFECTIVENESS:

Messages addressing issues of public health have always been a significant part of public communication and advertising. In *Communication Campaigns About Drugs*, written during the initial anti-drug media stirrings in the late 1980's, Pamela Shoemaker warned that:

“Although media can throw spotlights on problems, and perhaps move them higher on the public agenda, they cannot by themselves solve social problems. A solution to America's drug problem will involve a complex relationship among the parties involved. No one participant- neither the federal government, nor the media, nor the public- can solve the problem alone.”<sup>35</sup>

However, until the implementation of the Campaign, the drug prevention effort had been but a spotlight. One of the most significant aspects of the National Media Campaign, is that it was the first time a multi-dimensional effort was employed in drug prevention on a national scale. This Campaign is more than just the sum of its ads, but seeing as how 85% of the initial \$1 billion (currently \$2 billion) effort was geared towards the public service ads, and because most of the progress reports compiled for the ONDCP by the Annenberg School for Communication and those produced by PDFA, are centered on the effectiveness of TV spot evaluation, we must look to the ads themselves for a conclusive analysis of NYADMC.

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<sup>34</sup>Evaluation of the National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign: Fourth Semi-Annual Report of Findings  
[http://www.mediacampaign.org/publications/westat\\_report\\_2002/index.html](http://www.mediacampaign.org/publications/westat_report_2002/index.html)

<sup>35</sup> Shoemaker. p.5

Communication theories tend to stress that the power of anti-drug public service is limited for it must reflect reality while competing against possibly conflicting messages. ONDCP and other veterans of the War on Drugs have oftentimes insisted how the media fashions messages promoting drug use. The entertainment industry in particular has had to at times withstand severe criticism due to their alleged glamorization of drugs and the user culture, due to the lack of a definitive negative portrayal of consequences to users. (An offshoot of this ongoing debate included the recent scandal of purported government interference with network television shows, where ONDCP was accused of approving network scripts for anti-drug content,)<sup>36 37</sup> The constant battle against an imposing drug-friendly media culture was certainly one of the most often cited reasons for implementation of the Media Campaign and the formation of PDFA in the 1980's. However the attacks upon the media sector are not completely lacking in respect and appreciation of the medium as an indispensable vehicle for promotion of a drug-free lifestyle for America's youth which the federal government has made numerous promises to instill.<sup>38</sup>

In the selling of the anti-drug lifestyle, similar marketing strategies are employed with anti-drug public service messages as are for any other advertising campaign. However, whereas a commercial for any consumer product can be successful solely on the level of which it engages the target audience's attention, forging brand association and reinforcing ad recall based on the eye-catching visual aspects of the ad, such tactics fall short of what a public health campaign, particularly in the aims of drug prevention,

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<sup>36</sup> "What they've done by sneaking messages past the gatekeepers is to incur a tremendous loss of credibility. Everything the White House does now with respect to drug messages will be suspect and all their activities will be examined in great detail." Crano, Burgoon. Page 264

<sup>37</sup> 106<sup>th</sup> Congress. 2000

<sup>38</sup> McCaffrey. Vital Speeches. 1998

needs to achieve. Classic marketing works by engaging the audience's subconscious through repetition, and when the shopper steps into the aisle with many identical products, the hook which the advertiser has created undoubtedly influences the decision of which particular product is then purchased. Although incomplete, this model presents a very simple cause and effect relationship between the message and its outcome.

What makes public service advertising different is that it does not work around a simple transmission of an attention grabbing technique in order to develop brand loyalty. The issues which PSA's address usually have significantly more complex compositions, involving political, economic, and cultural factors, as well as other intricate social implications. During the onset of the AIDS epidemic and the ad campaigns which enacted it its wake, public health advocates had to fight prevailing myths and public perceptions on the risks and dangers of HIV, as well as an incomplete understanding of the means of transmission, not to mention the reluctance of the media to offend principal advertisers in mentioning condoms during prime time. However, subsequent and continual information dissemination efforts were in time able to give positive meaning and acknowledgment to the term "safe sex."

Drug abuse prevention could be said to work in a similar key. PDFA and ONCDP efforts both seek to "denormalize" drug use, which they hope to accomplish through various ads which depict the dangers of drug use and the social unacceptability of such behavior. However, the ubiquitous use of certain types of drugs, marijuana in particular, and the relatively low risk associated with such use, makes it much harder to significantly modify behavior.

The social marketing approach being used in the Media Campaign involves an evaluation of the environment in which the message will be perceived, identification of a target audience, and the markers used to segment that audience for greater target group focus, as well as specific design of campaign strategy and objectives. Four particular marketing considerations are at the center of this approach: a clear understanding of the specific behavior being influenced (the product), various social and psychological, as well as physical consequences of the desired behavior (the cost), the presentation and promotion of the positive behavior in ways which compensate for any of the possible negative consequences of complying with that behavior, and the actual possibility of the desired behavior being implemented, based on the environment.<sup>39</sup> In short, the implementers of the Campaign must be fully aware of who they want their messages to address, what possible factors would prevent the desired change of behavior, how those factors can be addressed and/or eliminated, and finally making sure the targets are fully empowered to make the preferable decision. Proper management and organization of the campaign is crucial if it is to succeed, along with a need for controlled progress evaluation. For the most part, these factors were implemented in the design of the Media Campaign as was outlined earlier.

What has been generally discovered about NYADMC in addition to previous PDFAs campaigns is that

“Health campaigns that are directly targeted to the focal segment of the population tend to have a modest degree of impact, and the effects on fundamental values and behavior patterns are very limited. But impact is highly

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<sup>39</sup> *Crano, Burgoon. Page 28*

variable, depending on the palatability of the advocated behavior and the receptivity of target audiences.”<sup>40</sup>

In other words, the message is most convincing to those who already believe in the dangers of drugs, so the ads work in a reiterative rather than a preventative or rehabilitative fashion. Meaning that those segments of youth population who are either most susceptible to drug experimentation, or at greater risk for developing truly disastrous habits, are virtually ignored, or else unreachable with the methods used. Meanwhile, preventing low risk use appear to raise rates of success for drug abstinence, but does little to actually sway the opinions of those individuals, as they are far less interested, or else already convinced of the dangers of drugs. All the while those who require prevention efforts most are usually not affected by the message.<sup>41</sup> In light of this, how can a truly effective campaign be implemented?

#### AN EFFECTIVE, MULTIFACETED STRATEGY

“Whether this immense campaign succeeds or fails rests, in part, on past knowledge and its current usage.”<sup>42</sup>

An effective and persuasive public health campaign does more than simply spread information about the risks and dangers of certain behaviors, as information without a more encompassing context does little to change behavior on its own. For example, the public has long known about the harmful effects of cigarette smoking, but until a nation-wide and community effort worked to revoke the status afforded the activity, smoking did not abate. In the same line, a strategy which mirrors the complexity of the social

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<sup>40</sup> *Crano, Burgoon. Page 37*

<sup>41</sup> *Crano, Burgoon. Page 43*

<sup>42</sup> *Crano, Burgoon. Page 3*

relations involved in any practice or behavior, is one which is far more effective. “Any persuasive health campaign is embedded in a larger set of social and political notions about healthy behavior.”<sup>43</sup> That which is considered to be socially acceptable or desirable is malleable, and constantly changing, and so these norms can ostensibly be configured to reflect values of the public good, hence the emphasis against drugs being viewed as “cool” in anti-drug ads focused at teenagers.

In addition, specific studies targeting implicit versus explicit message effectiveness on adolescents, find that subjects are “significantly more accepting of implicit anti-drug messages that emphasize some freedom of choice than of explicit messages that tell them what to do.”<sup>44</sup> The most persuasive messages were found to be those in which adults- who usually are perceived to be assertors of power, used an implicit approach in their anti-drug message. The message effectiveness in those studies was based on respondents’ cited intent to use marijuana in the future. Furthermore, the most persuasive messages were also those that violated teenagers expectations - supporting the Burgeon et al. Language Expectancy Theory which denotes expectations brought on by others actions. Since adults are expected to act commandingly towards teenagers, in effect using authoritative, direct messages against drug use, teens tend to exhibit highest resistance to precisely those kinds of messages. On the flip side, those messages which violate the expectation by presenting an implicit message respectful of teenagers’ decision making, are accepted much more willingly.

It comes of no surprise that “past research has shown teenagers untrusting of anti-drug mass media... and anti-drug PSA’s to be unsuccessful at bringing about desired

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<sup>43</sup> Crano, Burgoon. Page 29

<sup>44</sup> Crano, Burgoon. Page 80

attitude or behavior change in young people.”<sup>45</sup> Theories on message expectancy seem to show that based on negative perceptions of previous advertisements, new ads tend to automatically get framed in the same vein, leading precisely those individuals that the message seeks to convince to develop a strong negative bias towards each new anti-drug message.

Overall, there appears to be a research-based consensus indicating that the most effective messages are those which emphasize more likely albeit milder consequences rather than those which are graphic, representing the extreme rather than the norm.<sup>46</sup> Subtle, positive incentives tend to get through more than fear-based threatening messages. Thought provoking messages that appeal to reason tend to have a long term effect on behavior, whereas seemingly persuasive shock value from dramatic messages extends only short-term influence and does not stay with the viewer long enough to modify his or her behavior:

“The physical threat messages were more effective when the dependent variables were intention to comply with the message and self-reported behavior, whereas the social approval messages were more effective when actual behavior change was measured over time. Perhaps physical threat messages are effective as a short-term persuasion device, but have diminishing influence over time.”<sup>47</sup>

Additionally, the shock value of a particularly spectacular message can be evaluated as much less likely to engage to the viewer personally, for in providing an extreme gruesome case the message evokes a sense of non-application of the communication, where the viewer comes to view the situation as too unlikely to be true. Whereas more

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<sup>45</sup> Crano, Burgoon. Page 167

<sup>46</sup> Crano, Burgoon. Page 44

<sup>47</sup> Schoenbachler, Whittler. Journal of Advertising 1996

subtle emotional appeals may make headway when viewers are able to analyze and appreciate personal pertinence.

Deliberate fear-based PSA's are especially risky as viewers' psychological reactions to those messages may jeopardize the ad's effectiveness. Unfortunately, the prevailing trend of anti-drug advertising has embraced the utilization of scare tactics in order to effect attitude and behavior change in the target audience.<sup>48</sup> Defense mechanisms of selective perception or in avoidance of the message from wary viewers may either produce no effect, or in the worst case scenario, engage a boomerang effect—where the prevention message actually works to perpetuate the unwanted behavior. This is certainly something which ad creators are aware of, and do their best to avoid. A fear based approach can work, but it must be used skillfully and sparingly, as the method's effectiveness declines significantly from overuse.<sup>49</sup> In truth, research recommends that other types of incentives should be given greater emphasis and priority in the presentation of anti-drug PSA's.

A multi-analysis study conducted by Schoenbachler and Whittler on adolescent processing of various types of PSA's also found that an emphasis of social implications in an anti-drug ad is much more effective than that of the traditional physical harm threat approach. Consideration of the sensation seeking variable backed these findings—demonstrating that high sensation seekers, the same individuals who are much more likely to try drugs (up to four times more than low sensation seekers, for marijuana) and at the same time are less receptive to anti-drug advertising in general, benefit from a social context/threat approach in that behavior change is more likely with the use of

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<sup>48</sup> Schoenbachler, Whittler. *Journal of Advertising*. 1996

<sup>49</sup> Crano, Burgoon. *Page 45*

social implication messages. Furthermore, conclusions made on high sensation seeking adolescents suggested that they should form the target audience for future prevention campaigns.<sup>50</sup>

An effective ad development strategy is one which involves many of the variables tied to that of drug use prevention in general. Designing a broad based strategy with several differing methods is the key to an effective campaign. Such a campaign must have a well identified target audience- relying on its message to convince the at-risk pre-user population, as well as maintain support of those who are already favorably predisposed towards anti-drug messages. It should engage a diverse approach, utilizing a variety of persuasive appeals, as well as a large number of assorted messages in order to ensure that all the differing segments of the population with varying predispositions are addressed.

Persuasive messages are those which motivate, and according to classic persuasion theory, the approach that works best is the one which discusses then refutes the opposing position. In terms of drug prevention, examples of this abound in numerous ads that will soon be evaluated in depth. Presentation of such arguments are found in some of the Campaign's latest "Nick and Norm" ads, where the complexity of the link between drugs and terrorism is presented as definite, straightforward, following a simple, logical contention, rather than the seemingly complex creature it really is. Other examples include ads which refute the claim that everybody is doing drugs, or that drug use is a status symbol which makes one "cool," or that use is harmless to the user, combating the idea of drugs as "victimless crime."

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<sup>50</sup> Schoenbachler, Whittler. *Journal of Advertising*. 1996

What such ads accomplish is a presentation of various social incentives in making abstinence from drug experimentation more appealing. Both positive and negative incentives are useful as each magnify a particular facet of the discussion. Negative appeals bring up social concerns and detrimental consequences to drug use, such as getting busted, losing the trust or respect of one's family or peers, being a negative role model to younger siblings, making harmful decisions, and of late, though the claim has been contested, that of contributing to terrorism. Conversely, positive incentives present scenarios which, as the name suggests, enumerate the positive aspects of abstaining from drugs, roughly mirroring the negative incentives in their focus on reaffirming trust in relationships with friends and family, staying healthy and active, and being a positive role model. Diversifying the types of perspectives presented in the campaign as a whole is important, seeing as it increases the overall possible impact on viewers.<sup>51</sup>

While an effective message should potentially be clear and forthright, another useful approach engages strategic ambiguity which subtly activates the receptivity of differing audience segments. This method is shown to be particularly helpful in that without advocating a particular behavior or solution, possible counterarguments and reactance are reduced, while rousing introspection of the issue. Put simply, ambiguous messaging allows the audience to draw their own conclusions from a portrayal of a message implication, rather than a direct threat. This strategy is especially constructive when dealing with teenage audiences that are highly knowledgeable about the topic, negatively predisposed towards the message, and perceive the threat of manipulative

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<sup>51</sup> *Crano, Burgoon. 2002*

messaging from authority figures.<sup>52</sup> This approach plays to young adults' self-concept as independent thinkers, and also works at violating expectations of critical messages.

#### ANTI DRUG PSA MESSENGERS

Other strategies worthy of serious consideration include selection of an effective messenger, and although one type of messenger- a government official or a concerned mother, may not be any better than another, specific messengers are more effective depending on the component of behavior which needs to be emphasized:

“celebrities help draw attention to a dull topic, experts enhance response efficacy, ordinary people heighten self-efficacy, victims convey the severity of harmful outcomes, and victims sharing similar characteristics with the audience augment susceptibility claims.”<sup>53</sup>

Use of celebrities to deliver anti-drug messages is a common practice that has been employed since the very beginning of anti-drug advertising, and public health campaigns in general.<sup>54</sup> Using a well-known public personality bolsters the appeal of the message seeing as how it provides an outside, and supposedly more objective source of information than that of the federal government, or some unidentified speaker. The seeming ease of harnessing star power to piggyback an issue makes this approach popular.

To appeal to teens specifically, celebrity endorsement of the issue may even be necessary to get their attention, according to *Grenade*, a New York ad agency which has done work for PDFA in the past, with musicians and professional athletes generally

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<sup>52</sup> *Crano, Burgoon. Page 48*

<sup>53</sup> *Crano, Burgoon. Page 52*

<sup>54</sup> *Berke, New York Times. 1989*

making up the bulk of the stars who lend their credibility to anti-drug messages.<sup>55</sup> PDFA however didn't jump on the celebrity bandwagon initially, claiming research which showed that "talking head celebrities wagging their fingers, don't work."<sup>56</sup> Nevertheless, there are currently plenty of celebrity endorsements in the Media Campaign, from professional skateboarder Andy MacDonald, to the tennis star Williams sisters. Furthermore, because of the current focus on kids ages 11-17, celebrity pronouncements can certainly help where other figures fall short of getting the message through. Celebrities who have overcome drug use are able to provide guidance that is more than just saying "you can recover and be rich and famous," as PDFA used to claim.<sup>57</sup>

Positive reinforcement presented by specific famous talents, has been shown to be much more effective than the negative reinforcement with over-dramatized scenarios PDFA made their name producing. Musicians' Assistance Program and PDFA teamed up just before the implementation of the Media Campaign to express realities of addiction and value of a drug free lifestyle, using the likes of Lauryn Hill, the widow of Sublime's lead singer Bradley Nowell, in addition to other prominent artists, as spokespersons drawing from personal experience in getting the anti-drug message across.<sup>58</sup>

#### A SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGN:

Finally, an effective campaign is one which informs and persuades, but it must also spark enough interest or concern to motivate further exploration of the issue, seeing as how a 30 or 60 second announcement is only able to convey terse information. The

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<sup>55</sup> *Beardi, Advertising Age. 1999*

<sup>56</sup> *Berke. NY Times. 1989*

<sup>57</sup> *Berke. NY Times. 1989*

<sup>58</sup> *DeSalvo. Shoot. 1997*

invitation to explore the issue is presented with the use of hotline numbers and websites that the viewers can turn to. The Campaign also works to engage the persuasion efforts of potential youth influencers, such as parents, teachers, community leaders, and other authority figures. Parents in particular are targeted in the “ask questions,” “talk to your kids about drugs,” “parents: the anti-drug,” approach. Most importantly, the campaign must raise consciousness and awareness through sensitizing the audience to the issue, while at the same time being substantially dispersed so the message gets heard.<sup>59</sup>

Many elements are engaged in this effort, in addition to print and television ads, such as interactive websites- freevibe.com, theantidrug.com, as well as other Campaign sites, coalition building through businesses, agencies and communities, in addition to fostering and supporting drug-free extracurricular activities for schools and communities, provision of lesson plans and other educational materials to teachers, and parenting skills information.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> *Crano, Burgoon. Page 52*

<sup>60</sup> *NYADMC website [www.mediacampaign.org](http://www.mediacampaign.org)*

## METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this work is to perform an evaluative examination of the National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign via a content analysis of a cross-section of the television spots produced and aired for the campaign from the past few years. The evaluation is based on the breakdown of the effective media strategies presented earlier, taking into consideration variant factors related to the specific ads, keeping the overall goal of the Campaign in mind. The cross-section of ads focuses on preventative spots aimed at teens and pre-teens that are either experimenting or at risk for experimenting with various illegal substances. The Campaign is focused heavily against marijuana use in particular<sup>61</sup>, due to the drug having the most national influence, and following in line with the greater War on Drugs perception of marijuana as a gateway drug. The presentation of these spots will be divided into target audience based categories- those ads aimed at teenagers and those ads aimed at parents and other authority figures, with fairly even distribution between the two.

### *Ad Selection:*

In selecting ads for the content analysis, my primary objective was to choose a spectrum of ads which best represented the range and type of message in the Campaign, having a fairly equal number concerning both adult caretakers and youth. I tried to make an even selection to include both objective, information-based positive incentive messages, and some of the more controversial scare tactic based ads. In addition, I

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<sup>61</sup> *Campaign Treatment of Certain Drugs. Media Campaign Fact Sheet.*  
<http://www.mediacampaign.org/newsroom/factsheets/campaigntreatment.html> accessed 03/21/03

tended to choose ads which I myself recognized from broadcasts, and those which I felt made the most solid presentation in terms of reliance upon believable scenarios, facts, and incentives. There are dozens of television and print ads which comprise the Campaign as a whole, along with interactive websites, pamphlets, educational materials, and other multi-media sources. Even though my analysis only considers television ads, there was an impressive archive to choose from, situated on the websites of the Campaign itself, and PDFA. In all, eighteen ads are mentioned here, with thirteen of those ads receiving a full content analysis. I did my best to accommodate and address the most prevalent message types. The specific analysis of content will be further broken by message source, content specifics, and the type of approach utilized in the message.

*Addressing the source of the message-*

Most of the ads presented are those sponsored by PDFA in conjunction with ONDCP. However, the variety of messages, styles and strategies involved in the Campaign reflect the variety of agencies which produce them. Whenever possible, the creators of the message will be listed and identified, along with information of what other type of work these agencies tend to do, and what is the level of their contribution to the Campaign, as some agencies only create one, whereas some create dozens of ads. Other useful details may include production date and airing information on the ads themselves, including any relevant contextual elements.

### *Content Specifics-*

The speaker and the audience of the conveyed message will be identified. Recognition of the messenger is a crucial first step. We need to know if the carrier of the message can be identified, and if so, how does the messenger relate to the content being transmitted in his/her message? What is the perspective of the messenger, either involved in the action of the content or acting as an outside source of information? Who is the speaker, specifically- a celebrity, health care professional, unidentified authoritative figure, an emotionally/personally involved individual, etc?

What is the specific target audience for this message, if there is one? Many ads are tailored with direct audience segments in mind and this must be taken into consideration. The content of the message will be presented in detail, beginning with the format- either scenario or informative based, straightforward or implicit. Finally, additional information, if any, as it is presented beyond the direct scenario- contact information in the form of a hotline or website where the audience can explore the issue further.

### *What is the approach?*

First, the type of incentive used will be assessed on a general spectrum of either positive or negative reinforcement, followed in turn by an assessment of the message strategy. This includes the type of appeal made by the message - whether the message aims to provide factual information, target an emotional response, stimulate conversation, or arouse fear, and what the specific aim of the message could be- the expressed or

implied target behavior the message is trying to achieve. Of course none of these tactics are mutually exclusive, and an effective ad makes use of several. Most importantly we need to assess what is being conveyed by the message, and by what means. What sorts of techniques does the ad make use of in pitching its message. Specifically, these will be the elements discussed in the effective communication section, such as strategic ambiguity, scare tactics, and the like, along with various forms of direct marketing, such as shock value, catchy slogans, use of jingles or music in the ad, and affective, attention grabbing imagery.

Questions of message credibility will address any possible over-exaggeration or nondisclosure the message may carry, such as the lack of particular information. Credibility of the message will be assessed in line of what information is readily available on the specific topic presented in the message, as well as any obvious gaps in coherence or sequence of events. An evaluation of the orientation of the message will be discussed, such as if the message leans more toward marketing or public health policy. Finally, any information regarding the reception of the ad will be disclosed, such as documented public reaction, available criticism, and/or honorary awards. The question of how the ad compares to others with a similar message and audience will be raised in the end, along with an evaluation of the ad as a whole, engaging the theories and strategies outlined in earlier chapters.

Following the thorough content analysis, ongoing evaluation from NIDA and independent researchers presenting information to the ONDCP on the status of the Campaign will be presented, further clarifying the issue of efficacy of the Campaign as a whole, beyond individual PSA's. In the concluding section, questions of message and

general campaign efficacy will be addressed, as well as general organizational credibility of the sponsoring organizations and agencies which have run this Campaign through taxpayer funding and a heavy reliance on media donation for the last five years.

## VI

### CONTENT ANALYSIS

#### *National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign*

Beginning with the earlier ads, and working through to the most recent airings, will provide a sense of how the message has shifted over the course of the Campaign. “This is your brain on drugs” frying pan ad, in its second reincarnation, was the most widely mentioned and memorable of all the anti-drug ads, and although created before the implementation of the campaign, was incorporated into it.<sup>62</sup> However, despite the ad’s visibility, its primarily shock value content- a young woman wreaking havoc with a frying pan in an analogy for heroin addiction’s effects on life, career and family, is some of the most contested.<sup>63</sup>

One of the biggest developments of the Media Campaign, has been the creation of the slogan “the Anti Drug,” which is continuously being pitched in many of the Campaign’s PSA’s. Developed first in 1999 by Ogilvy & Mather, ONDCP’s premier ad creator for the campaign, the tagline was found by the agency to be useful in raising

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<sup>62</sup> Hill. “Drug Money.” Brandweek. 1998

<sup>63</sup> “Twenty-nine TV commercials - including a dramatic reprise of the 'Frying Pan' spot - have aired during primetime slots such as Friends and Seinfeld, and top-rated annual events such as the Super Bowl and the Academy Awards. Margeotes/Fertitta + Partners in New York created the new 'Frying Pan' ad which features a girl who smashes a kitchen with a frying pan as a metaphor for the damage heroin can inflict.” PDF/A Annual Report 1999  
[http://www.drugfreeamerica.org/Templates/Annual\\_Report.asp?ws=PDF/A&vol=1&grp=About+us&cat=Annual+Report&top=Annual+Report](http://www.drugfreeamerica.org/Templates/Annual_Report.asp?ws=PDF/A&vol=1&grp=About+us&cat=Annual+Report&top=Annual+Report)

awareness among parents, but not very effective for teens, whose response seemed to indicate they found it too authoritarian.<sup>64</sup> In order to appeal more to teens, ONDCP ran a nationwide “what’s your anti drug?” contest, so incorporated ideas from peers would make the concept more appealing. “The anti-drug” is by far the most utilized slogan in the Campaign. Some of the most frequently engaged concepts portrayed as “anti-drugs” in the ads include communication, trust, love, facts, opportunity, parents, sports, pride, and honesty.

One of the more recent ads to use “the anti drug” slogan, pitched “parents” as the tagline, as in the ad “Thanks,” released in 2001. This spot, which has significant prime-time exposure, is a blend of an informational and a scenario based ad, featuring teens dispelling the idea that restrictive or questioning parents are bad parents. Several teens who appear in other ads of the same series, express their appreciation for parental intrusion and unwavering involvement in a seamless progression of teen faces and voices, saying “I snuck out, you caught me, I lied, you knew, I pushed and you pushed back, you invaded my *privacy* (original emphasis), I thought you were the worst parents in the world. Thanks.” The ad ends with a black screen that proclaims- “Ask: Who, What, When, Where, Parents- the Anti Drug.” Which is followed by the website [theantidrug.com](http://theantidrug.com) and an 800 number. The ad is listed as being sponsored by ONDCP and PDFA. Parents are the obvious target audience for this ad, and many others like it that came out as the Campaign increased its focus upon parents being engaged in their children’s lives so as to prevent drug use.

The ad uses a strategically ambiguous approach. No mention of drugs is made by the speaker- the teens speaking with one voice, the implication is less than overt, but

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<sup>64</sup> Melillo, “ONDCP gives teens the final word in campaign.” ADWEEK Southeast. 2000

suggests that parents who are involved and ask questions will be successful in keeping their kids away from drugs, and that these efforts will eventually be appreciated. The purpose of the ad is to comfort those parents who may feel that nagging may be counterproductive or perhaps lead to a bad rapport with their kids, and provide a positive incentive – teens will learn to appreciate such parental contribution, involvement, and persistency. Because the ad itself does not actually provide much information, it is helpful that both a hotline number and a website are listed as sources for further inquiry. In addition, the musical jingle accompanying the “Ask” tagline, which is used consistently with the slogan, gives the PSA a more defined flair, as well as making the message more memorable.

Another aspect of the strategic ambiguity of the “Thanks” ad, is that teens who view the ad and identify with what the portrayed speakers are saying, will be presented with a potential opportunity to re-evaluate the way they see such possibly irritating and frustrating behavior on the part of their parents. However, the implication in this case would be that parental nagging will help keep them from doing drugs, and how convincing such a conjecture may be is difficult to evaluate. This ad certainly helps to raise the issue of good rapport between teens and parents, but does not present much information. Taking Crano & Burgoon’s theories into account, however, as well as the sensation seeking category, it would seem this ad would appeal more to the low sensation seeking target group, and that this kind of subtle approach may very well be more effective in the long term.

Playing off the idea of family values, are another two ads created by the agency Fletcher Martin during the 1999-2000 Campaign season. The first ad, entitled “Two

Brothers,” with an unidentified speaker, portrays two boys of varying ages enjoying several activities together, followed by the older being approached by some friends and offered a joint. “Some kids think that smoking weed makes you cool,” an unseen voice proclaims, “what about those who already think that you are?” The older brother, seeing his younger brother looking on, is conflicted with the decision to accept the joint. This scenario ad provides an implicit positive incentive of being a positive role model by not doing drugs, and portraying responsible action as rewarding.

The second of the two ads- “Mother/Daughter,” portrays the mother of a young girl as the speaker, (both of whom are African American,) talking about how wonderful her daughter is, the trials of being a single parent and the like, during which we see the girl walking through a park. The girl is greeted by a young man either her age or older, and the mother gets serious- “I know a lot of kids are on drugs, thank God Tanya’s not like that,” just as the daughter is offered what appears to be a joint, though the image is furtively ambiguous. The marijuana implication is solidified by the voiceover: “If you smoke weed, it probably won’t kill you, but it will kill your mother,” ending with the Partnership emblem. No ONDCP citation is made, nor is any additional information provided. The message is clear, though somewhat preachy, certainly more so than the Brothers ad, and presents the potential to lose one’s parents love and trust as negative incentive against marijuana use.

Teens are the obvious audience for this spot, they are addressed via the “it’ll kill your mother” angle. Parents viewing the ad would also be influenced through the portrayal of the mother as optimistically denying her child’s drug use, making a conjecture that only bad kids use drugs, or that the belief that their own child would never

do drugs. Such a presentation mirrors an average parents' fears, hopes and desires about their job as a parent and trust in their children's actions. In this way, the "Mother/Daughter" ad works an effective emotional hook, and though it presents a strong message, there is no explicit "don't do drugs," message as ads aimed at a younger audience might engage. The ad does imply that one's actions have ramifications beyond one's own self, with significant potential to affect others, especially loved ones. Another way to interpret the message may be "don't lose your parents' trust over something silly like marijuana," or "your parents are more important than drugs." However, the only directly negative perspective presented in this ad is if you engage in this type of activity, the worst that may happen is that you upset your parent(s), when it is fairly common knowledge that this type of deterrence alone is not enough to stop kids from engaging in all sorts of similar, potentially dangerous or unfavorable activities.

The ad does however make use of one of the strongest emotional hooks available, and for that reason may very well be an effective ad, although its influence is certainly not very far reaching. Kids who are not emotionally engaged with their parents feelings won't be persuaded, and because of its simple, straight-forward manner, it is probably more effective against low sensation seekers, teens who have a lower tendency to try drugs in general, not those who already may be regular users or whose parents may not be emotionally charged on the issue.

Two other 30 second spots aimed at the same age group, part of Ogilvy's "You are here" campaign,<sup>65</sup> also deal with parent-teen relations, and portray kids at home and grounded, because they "smoked pot and parents found out", while their friends are shown having a good time playing outside and watching movies. "Lose your parents

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<sup>65</sup> Campaign Viewer [www.drugfreeamerica.org](http://www.drugfreeamerica.org) last accessed 03/26/03

trust and you could kiss your social life goodbye,” is the main message, “trust” being the anti-drug tagline of these ads. Theantidrug.com website is presented as well.

These scenario ads engage social implications through negative incentive, carrying a simple, direct message of ‘dabble with drugs, get in trouble, forfeit future fun,’ in playing up the social unacceptability of marijuana. Psychologically, these ads get on the kids level, by engaging believable kid portrayals and concerns, seeing as how adolescents are usually most concerned with not getting in trouble with parents, rather than other dangers of drug use, such as getting hurt or arrested. Based on communication theories discussed earlier, it would appear that these type of non-threatening, social implication ads which avoid placing blame or engaging in any type of overt scare tactics are much more persuasive, particularly because they present the issue in a real-life way, without needing to resort to extremes. Nevertheless, these ads do have one big limitation, and that is that they are geared for a very specific age group, with older teens and young adults whose decisions are not as much under control of parental supervision being not well suited for the message. These ads are most effective as preventative measures, as well as convincing those adolescents who have probably tried marijuana, but have not yet become regular users.

Another significant pitch of the anti-marijuana campaign questions the premise that the drug poses no harm. Because many early efforts at attacking the health consequences of pot use were heavily criticized for presenting false information, such as the scandal regarding the PDFA cat scan ad, where a comatose patient’s graph was presented as that of a pot smoker,<sup>66</sup> many of the current ads attacking marijuana tend to focus on social rather than physical ramifications. This method follows suit with the

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<sup>66</sup> *Buchanan, Wallack. Journal of Drug Issues. 1998*

recommendations presented by Crano & Burgoon. A good portion of the most recent ads, are in this category, and follow Drug Czar John Walters' stepped up mission in fighting marijuana use among teens.<sup>67</sup> These ads include the "possible alternatives" ads created by Leo Burnett, which express how marijuana impairs judgment, roadside study ads which present marijuana as a possible motor accident contributor, and the Super Bowl pregnancy ad by Ogilvy & Mather.

In both "Den" and "Concert" PSA's, teenage boys are shown smoking pot. The first ad taking place in a house basement, and the second in a bathroom stall at a concert. The scenario involves one-line simplistic dialogue that is fairly plot irrelevant, beyond that pot smoking is mentioned, and the scene is rewound each time, presenting a slightly altered dialogue. There are three alternate endings, and in the final one the warning is made. In the "Concert" ad, an undercover cop busts the kids smoking, while in the "Den" spot one of the teens accidentally shoots his friend with the gun he was showing off while hanging out and smoking. In the other ads in the series created by Leo Burnett, a teen girl is taken advantage of after smoking too much, and a car of stoned teens runs over a kid on a bike pulling out of a drive-thru lot. The ads end with the tagline "Marijuana can get you busted," and "Marijuana can impair your judgment- Harmless?"

These ads specifically were developed based on surveys that indicated youth lacked knowledge about the harm caused by use of marijuana, and that getting into trouble with the law and making stupid mistakes were the top two reasons teens perceived marijuana as harmful.<sup>68</sup> However, there is a huge difference between what

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<sup>67</sup> Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Weekly. 2002

<sup>68</sup> "Research based ads focus on dangers of marijuana use." Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Weekly. 2002

adolescents say will get them to stop recreational drug use, and what actually works, as has been elaborated by the research presented earlier. Basing ad/campaign development solely on self-reported survey answers, something which PDFA relies upon quite heavily, is unfortunately unreliable.<sup>69</sup> Furthermore, some of scenarios presented in the alternate endings are simply too fictitious to be believable, additionally no mention is made of the effect of alcohol in judgment impairment.

The “roadside studies” ads developed by Ogilvy, present marijuana as the culprit of yet another type of unfortunate incident. A Super Bowl ad called “Memorial,” where a teen visits the memorial site where his kid brother was killed in an accident he was responsible for, and the ad “Dummies” which alludes to the well known dummy safety belt campaign, presenting marijuana as a cause of the collision. Both ads proclaim that “in a roadside study, one in three reckless drivers who were tested for drugs tested positive for marijuana. It’s more harmful than we all thought. Knowledge, the anti drug.” Despite the hard-impact presentation, the messages of these ads are implicit. The general tone is neither threatening nor accusatory. The tagline “it’s more harmful that we all thought” may very well be one of the more innocuous ones of the whole campaign, but the impact is there, the message is clear and direct, and involves both teens and adults, although the impact is more youth-oriented. Despite the fact that these ads certainly fall under physical harm negative incentive that scored poorly in the research category, the thought provoking message makes the ad more accessible to the discerning teenage audience these ads are trying to reach.

One criticism of the message here however is that these ads in particular present the accident factor as a hard-nosed statistic, when in reality the effect is much less

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<sup>69</sup> Hill, “Drug money.” Brandweek. 1998

severe than is portrayed. It is significant that no mention is made of alcohol in these spots, particularly considering the fact that the two are certainly linked, especially in the case of impaired operation of motor vehicles. Although the intention of the message is to get teens to reconsider their actions, especially concerning safety of impaired driving, the fact that no connection to drunk driving, which is certainly far more rampant, is made, presenting marijuana as the sole culprit, may affect the credibility of these ads. However, the “Memorial” ad in particular also engages a powerful emotional hook, portraying a brother grieving a death he was directly responsible for. The presentation of the ads certainly seems to fit in with research in terms of the approach- it does not directly appropriate blame, but it is thought-provoking.

The presentation of factual information appears to aid the message as well, even though the speaker presenting the information is not seen, and the factual statistic is questionable. If there was a reliable name or organization to go along with the mention of the road-side study, that may have made all the difference. No information is presented on the research which acquired those figures. Because no presentation is made of who was responsible for the study, or how it was carried out, does not paint an entirely trustworthy picture, although the collision dummies ad seems to have more of an air of authority, thanks to the visible crash test. As for supplementary information, the website [freevibe.com](http://freevibe.com), a teen focused anti-drug information/hang out site, is listed. Statistics aside, the ad does have some redeeming qualities.

The latest in the series of Super Bowl anti-marijuana ads, is the 2003 ad by Ogilvy. Entitled “Pregnancy,” this scenario spot is aimed at both kids and adults, leaning towards teen influence, and portrays a young-ish middle-aged couple worrying over the

results of a home pregnancy test. The message reads “There will be an addition to their family soon. Their lives will change dramatically.” The expectation is that the woman is pregnant, but as the shocker-twist in the plot presents, “they will be the youngest grandparents in town,” zooming in on the face of a very young teen girl. The ad ends with a voiceover of “smoking marijuana impairs your judgment. It’s more harmful than we all thought. Knowledge, the anti drug.” The ad then lists the teen anti drug website [freevibe.com](http://freevibe.com), which was developed as part of the multi-media aspect of the Campaign.

Arguably the same criticism can be made of this ad as of the roadside studies ads, in that alcohol is certainly as much of an issue if not more so in such a scenario, notably, the risk of having unprotected sex due to intoxication. However, because alcohol holds a much more visible pertinence to such a situation, the marijuana link appears much weaker in comparison, and could attribute to the PSA not being as effective. As an aside, teen pregnancy does not automatically result in teen motherhood, so the ad may further lose with pro-choice savvy audiences.

The shock approach is used quite liberally in this instance, and because the message is so unexpected, the ad is certainly attention-grabbing. However, a shock based approach tends to be more effective in the short term, its influence fading over time, and this is certainly an ad which lacks long term effectiveness. Since the hook is concentrated in the surprise factor, once the audience starts to recognize this ad’s tactic, the attention-grasping effect will fall.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup>*Crano, Burgoon. Page 41*

### *Linking Drugs and Terror*

In 2002, ONDCP released a new campaign tactic demonstrating the drug-terrorism link,<sup>71</sup> produced by ONDCP's lead ad agency- Ogilvy & Mather. One of the very first in this line of PSA's addressed the problematic issue of drug trade funding terrorist activity, evoking concerns over the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>. The "AK 47" ad shows supposed terrorists buying up property, transportation, and guns, while an unidentified voice asks- "Where do terrorists get their money? If you buy drugs, some of it may come from you," followed by theantidrug.com website citation. The audience for this ad are teens and drug users in general, with a scare tactic approach expressed through negative incentive, which ads following this debut elaborated upon. Playing upon the emotional impact of the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks, this content approach aimed to inspire patriotism through drug abstinence, providing officials with an incredibly convenient though specious opportunity to attack both drug use and terrorism in one swoop. PDFA on their part were not involved in the process of creating those ads, as the government's hired agency Ogilvy & Mather did on behalf of ONDCP. PDFA's survey research had indicated that parents would be more inclined to bring up the subject with their kids if they were made to understand the connection, but had not yet completed the study on the effectiveness of this proposed communication before Ogilvy was given the go-ahead to create the spots.

Much more direct ads, further played upon this fear of terrorism, as did those released in late 2002, early 2003. The ads, named after the portrayed average kid/adult drug user (though marijuana was the only drug mentioned), sport two new slogans: "drug

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<sup>71</sup> *Media Campaign Fact Sheets: Drugs and Terror*  
[www.mediacampaign.org/newsroom/factsheets/drugsterror.html](http://www.mediacampaign.org/newsroom/factsheets/drugsterror.html) last accessed 03/25/03

money supports terrible things,” and “I helped.” The “terrible things” ad series follows a very specific sequence- “This is Stacy. This is the dime bag Stacy bought. This is Stacy’s dealer. This is the smuggler from whom Stacy’s dealer gets the pot. This is the innocent family/individual whom Stacy’s smuggler killed for getting in the way,” concluding with “drug money supports terrible things,” and [theantidrug.com](http://theantidrug.com) website link. The “I helped” ads, similarly follow a simplistic, specific script. They portray harried-looking kids that in the course of the ad “confess” to aiding the murder of innocent children and their families. The entire ad consists of a close up shot of the actor reciting their “crimes”, blank faced, further hammering home the connection between drug use and violent crime, and especially terrorist connected crime. Ads “Sophie” and “Timmy”, both produced by Ogilvy, are examples of the “I helped” series. The actors’ lack of emotion further enhances the horror the ad is supposed to instill.

Another particularly disquieting ad in the same vein is called “Ghost Office,” and was part of the Super Bowl ad series. This particular ad portrayed a young woman in her 30’s sitting at her office desk, being approached by a little girl dressed in white, the speaker, who appears to be eight years old or so. The words “the messenger” flash on the screen as the little ghost girl says “You killed me, I was on my way to school. There was a bomb.” When the woman asks how she could have possibly been involved, the little girl pipes up with “you bought drugs, you gave them money. It’s about the money.” The ad closes with the “terrible things” slogan, and [theantidrug.com](http://theantidrug.com) website. The accusation scenario of this ad is arguably even more explicit than the other logical progression ads, making the scare tactic or shock value of the message even more overt. Also, the audience for this ad could be just about anybody, although the office setting and the

categorization of the ad on the Media Campaign website, where the ads are sorted into parent and youth audiences, would suggest it is aimed more at adults than teenagers. Parents would also be arguably more susceptible to accusations of funding the killing of children than younger audiences, who may not fully grasp the connection. However, in focus group based prescreening research done on the anti-drug ads, actually found the opposite effect. Teens were more likely to see the ads as persuasive than were adults, who felt the ads oversimplified and exaggerated the issue; though they agreed that the ads provided another focus for discussion.<sup>72</sup>

Aside from the juxtaposed implications of patriotism and guilt, the terrorist link approach seeks to dispel the victimless crime portrayal of “responsible” drug use, touting that even occasional use can be socially irresponsible. However, the harsh and overly linear portrayals of these ads were not at all well received. The production agency claimed that the purpose of the ads was to stimulate a re-evaluation of the issue, rather than simply blame drug users for aiding terrorists,<sup>73</sup> but that has certainly not been apparent in the response. Some critics even insisted that these ads were just too much like early marijuana prohibition propaganda,<sup>74</sup> and that viewers sensing this direction would not be swayed. In fact, the whole drugs-terrorism link was denounced as too uncertain to be wholly credible. Comparable to being told one must clean their plate because there are other starving children, according to Rep. Steny Hoyer, D-Md,<sup>75</sup> who, interestingly enough, is cited on the Media Campaign’s website as wholly supportive of

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<sup>72</sup> Teinowitz, “Drug ads fail another test.” Advertising Age. 2002

<sup>73</sup> Melillo, Adweek. 2002

<sup>74</sup> “Outside View: Marijuana Policy Fails Youth.” United Press International. 2002

<sup>75</sup> Melillo, Adweek. 2002

the drugs-terror effort.<sup>76</sup> One can only assume that the ads did not meet expectations. At least one successful parody of the ads was created by the Detroit Project, in order to express how tangential the links between all drugs and terrorism are, notably linking SUV's and oil consumption to funding terrorism.<sup>77</sup> ONDCP and Ogilvy spokespersons expressed that since "imitation is the highest form of flattery,"<sup>78</sup> they were not bothered by such associations. It is pertinent to note that naturally not all drugs used in the U.S. are smuggled, and marijuana in particular is oftentimes locally produced, however, for the basis of coherent argument, this information has not been addressed.

The debate over whether the presentation of these links was effective or persuasive,

"has surrounded the drugs-and-terror ads since they first aired during this year's Super Bowl, and illustrates the tension between the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy and the Partnership for a Drug-Free America over the campaign's creative direction,"<sup>79</sup>

and of course goes even further. The fact that Ogilvy is paid to produce the drugs and terror ads, rather than the customary pro-bono work, marks a fundamental shift for the Campaign and anti-drug advertising in general. This change placed the creation of the ads in the hands of one favored agency, with ONDCP leading the creative direction and dictating the drug focus, intervention approach and type of the message, for the most part bypassing the creative selection process previously employed by PDFA.<sup>80</sup> ONDCP

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<sup>76</sup> *Media Campaign Fact Sheets: Drugs and Terror.*

[www.mediacampaign.org/newsroom/factsheets/drugsterror.html](http://www.mediacampaign.org/newsroom/factsheets/drugsterror.html) last accessed 03/25/03

<sup>77</sup> *The Detroit Project* <http://www.thedetroitproject.com/ads/default.htm> last accessed 03/27/03

<sup>78</sup> Melillo, "Irony follows ad 'parody' debut." *Adweek Eastern Edition*. 2003

<sup>79</sup> Melillo, *Adweek*. 2002

<sup>80</sup> Eitel, Patricia. *Personal interview*. 04/10/03

decided to start paying for the ads after failing to observing a discernible decline in teenage use during the first two and a half years of pro-bono effort of the Campaign.<sup>81</sup>

The newest wave of ads in the drugs and terror category bypass the scare tactics and engage in a discussion of the issue as a whole rather than providing alarming sound bites without a solid foundation of facts. The “Nick and Norm” series of ads aimed at parents present arguments along with the terrorism link.<sup>82</sup> They portray two men discussing the drug and terror connection, a younger skeptic raising conflicting arguments which are then refuted by the older, established conservative. At the conclusion of each of the four ads, the younger speaker concedes to the opinion of his companion. The elegant presentation of these scenario ads, aimed at adults rather than kids, who would arguably not be engaged by the dry, no frills presentation, in the end is still tainted by the lack of a coherent argument. This is particularly so in the “Ploy” ad, which attempts to bring up the valid contention that the drugs and terror link is “a manipulation” by the authorities rather than a real threat. This approach presents an opportunity to truly engage the audience and address them as intelligent, discerning citizens, but unfortunately the rebuttal presented is a classic “it is because I say so” strategy, one that has shown little if any promise of persuasion. Needless to say, although there was a potential to be more convincing, through the engagement of opposing arguments, rather than alarmist strategy, the approach has not been particularly successful. To further display the lack of solid foundation in the logic of the ads, a pro-

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<sup>81</sup> Melillo, “Drug czar: pay for ads; advises halt to pro bono anti-drug creative.” Adweek Eastern Edition. 2002

<sup>82</sup> Teinowitz, Advertising Age. 2002

marijuana parody was created by the Marijuana Policy Project in the exact style of the spots, presenting an entirely different resolution.<sup>83</sup>

All in all, the drugs and terror series contributed to approximately 20% of all anti-drug ads targeted at parents and youth during the evaluation period ending in June 2002, according to the Westat and Annenberg reports, though because of the conspicuous nature of their broadcasts, the impact was assumed to be greater. Furthermore, despite the makers' expectations, documented parent and youth evaluation of those ads indicated lower reception than for other ads broadcast during the same period.<sup>84</sup>

## VII

### CONCLUSION

#### *When Politics and Media Intersect:*

The anti-drug PSA effort has played an ever present active role in the media to stem youth drug use/abuse as well as educate parents and youth on the dangers of substance abuse, both latent and manifest. Governmental involvement in the form of the NYADMC, through generous federal funding has significantly increased exposure of such an effort, while simultaneously redefining the rules of public service. This new campaign has significantly complicated what has characteristically been the traditional approach- exclusively relying on pro bono advertising, and donated air time, to using taxpayer funds to purchasing both creative production and high profile air time, such as the unprecedented advertising during the most prestigious and expensive telecast- that of the Super Bowl broadcast. (\$3.4 million was spent on the purchase of the "AK 47" and

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<sup>83</sup> "Did I say that?" <http://www.mpp.org/WarOnDrugCzar/commercials/> last accessed 03/27/03

<sup>84</sup> Highlights of the Phase5 Report. <http://www.mediacampaign.org/publications/westat5/highlights.pdf> last accessed 03/29/03

“I helped” spots in 2002.)<sup>85</sup> Yet despite the heightened visibility of this new wave of anti-drug PSA’s, there have been multiple logistical problems in the course of the Campaign, now in its sixth year. These conflicts were by no means unwarranted, considering the scope and complexity of the effort, and the high profile status of the organizations involved, each with a slightly different spin on the issue, their own characteristic approach, so it is no wonder the implementation of the program has seen been fraught with numerous changes and obstacles.

Many well known, big name advertising agencies offered their services in the fight against youth drug use, the PDFFA site itself lists 42 different groups,<sup>86</sup> while more than 100 have contributed their efforts to PDFFA in particular.<sup>87</sup> In the course of the campaign, both pro bono work, and increasingly paid advertising has provided more ways to harness the creative efforts of the advertising industry to foster a positive relationship with the youth of America. Pro bono creative works had been the standard in public service advertising, oftentimes because the campaigning non-profits lacked the funds to hire professional talent, but the relationship had certainly been two fold, providing the consumer-oriented agencies with an opportunity to channel their expertise and talent in a more socially conscious and positive manner, oftentimes earning the agencies prestigious awards as well as invaluable PR opportunities.

Regardless, it was obvious that even the most generous creative efforts would come short in both time and energy when compared to work done for a paid client, as well as the lack of sufficient pre-air testing that an agency would do working pro-bono.

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<sup>85</sup> “Gov’t makes Super Bowl buy.” *Variety*. 2002

<sup>86</sup> *Campaign Viewer*

[http://www.drugfreeamerica.org/Campaigns/Campaign\\_View.asp?type=agency&page=default](http://www.drugfreeamerica.org/Campaigns/Campaign_View.asp?type=agency&page=default)  
last accessed 03/29/03

<sup>87</sup> *Buchanan, Wallack*. *Journal of Drug Issues*. 1998

Seeing as how both research and decision making came from PDFA, far from an impartial body in the effort, the ads oftentimes lacked proper application. Despite undisputable good intentions, such effort still may be a “creative exercise in the name of good citizenry,” rather than effective public health policy, and in truth, as the experience of the Media Campaign showed after its first two and a half years, “lack of the checks and balances proper research can provide may lead to work that, while creative, can hinder the desired effect.”<sup>88</sup> Thanks to the resounding criticism of pro-bono advertising, ONDCP hired Ogilvy & Mather, a top New York agency, to thoroughly research the anti-drug ads that the agency would produce for the Campaign. Ogilvy in turn pre and post tested every single ad in order to prevent any unintended negative consequences. The testing methods involved teen focus groups viewing the ads followed by an intention of use questionnaire, with a control group that filled out the questionnaire but did not view the ads.<sup>89</sup> However this kind of testing approach is cluttered by the problems self-reporting has posed numerous other studies on the topic, with anti-drug questions possibly baiting viewers for what are perceived to be desired answers. Also, such testing can only capture the immediate, short term influence of the ads, and has no way of discerning results in the long-term. It is no wonder then that despite seemingly thorough production, even the well researched and tested paid ads had so little effect.

Considering all of the history and all of the years of harnessed creative energy being poured into the Campaign, the ads had to be the redeeming factor- effective and resounding. Yet, \$2 billion and over five years later, no effectiveness could be proved according to NIDA evaluation reports on youth drug perspectives and usage rates.

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<sup>88</sup> Hill, “Drug money.” Brandweek. 1998

<sup>89</sup> Eitel, Patricia. Personal interview. 04/10/03

Considering that the actual research on effective anti-drug communication had determined what the most effective methods would be, and that the Campaign did implement many of those recommendations, it is even more surprising that no decline in adolescent drug use could be ascertained after years of sustained efforts.

The current drug czar John Walters has been at odds with the Campaign even before he took office, preferring to leave the fight to the DEA and addressing what he sees as more definitive issues, as well as personally campaigning against what he believes to be drug-friendly legislation. So it comes as no surprise that Walters, as the head of the office which sponsors a campaign he believes to be a waste of federal funds, has indicated that he wishes to cut the NYADMC if the ads cannot be made to prove their worth.<sup>90</sup> However, Walters methods in streamlining the Campaign by cutting down the number of different messages, accentuating physical, social and moral risk through more a more controversial negative spin, and directly targeting marijuana, are quite at odds with the recommended approach aiming instead to diversify the message pool, and provide more positive social implications. In fact, the kind of approach which Walters favors, placing emphasis on the risk and moral application on the evils of drug use, are two of the most *ineffective* of all anti-drug PSA approaches according to the National Research Council.<sup>91</sup> Zero-tolerance policies in general, which the current ads have reverted to, are misguided and unrealistic.<sup>92</sup> “Applying blanket statements [drug users are consorting with terrorists] and simplistic solutions [just say no] to deeply personal issues that vary by individual” certainly only hurt the drug prevention effort, especially considering the psychological implications of such no gray area messages, for “when

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<sup>90</sup> Teinowitz. “Drug ads fail another test.” Advertising Age 2002

<sup>91</sup> Informing America’s Policy on Illegal Drugs. Page 223

<sup>92</sup> Hill, “Drug money.” Brandweek. 1998

young people recognize that they are being taught to follow directions, rather than to make decisions, they feel betrayed and resentful.”<sup>93</sup> PDFFA’s own campaigns have been criticized for providing too narrow a scope, primarily relying on fear arousal and simplistic “don’t do drugs” messages, where a more subtle, pro-social message would have been more effective.<sup>94</sup> Once again, it is no wonder that both Walters and PDFFA have criticized particular “too highly nuanced” ads which actually fell within specifications laid out by independent researchers and social scientists. Steve Pasierb, PDFFA president, also blamed the ineffectiveness of the new messages precisely on the fact that they have become too soft, too positive.<sup>95</sup>

One of the biggest reported problems with research provided by PDFFA that has significantly influenced the Campaign, if not helped to form its basis, is the research which determines which ads are most effective, and explores PDFFA’s success in general. The issue sighted in critique of those studies points out the heavy reliance upon faulty specifications. It is also problematic that most of the research which was used to back governmental support has *never even been published*. Furthermore, the author of one of the central reports which had claimed a 75% deterrent rate of anti-drug advertising, later insisted the report to be inconclusive, as it was based on self-reporting by kids which was most likely distorted by to a predominance of socially desirable answers, rather than observed behavior.<sup>96</sup>

Meanwhile, the semiannual reports published by Westat and Annenberg, have consistently found no conclusive evidence for the positive influence on youth behavior.

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<sup>93</sup> Grimm, American Demographics. 2002

<sup>94</sup> Buchanan, Wallack. Journal of Drug Issues. 1998

<sup>95</sup> “Up in smoke.” ABC News.com 2002

<sup>96</sup> Hill, “Drug money.” Brandweek. 1998

As such, the Campaign has only been able to achieve one of its goals- “elevate the awareness and profile of the anti-drug campaign to levels previously unobtainable via the use of solely pro bono support.”<sup>97</sup> This leads one to assume either that the ads were ineffective, or that the premise they would be effective was at fault. As my research and content analysis shows, although some of the ads seemed promising, they fall short of fulfilling expectations, and oftentimes revert to die-hard ineffective strategies.

Highlights of the latest reports indicate that although the Campaign has had a positive effect on parents, who are more likely to talk to their children about the dangers of drug abuse as a result of the PSA effort, there is no proven positive indirect effect on youth behavior as a result of increased parental interest and exposure. As for the increased effort on marijuana use prevention,

“there is no statistically significant decline in marijuana use to date, and some evidence for an increase in use from 2000 and 2001. Nor are there improvements in beliefs and attitudes about marijuana use between 2000 and the first half of 2002. Contrarily, there are some unfavorable trends in youth anti-marijuana beliefs.”

Particularly important for the Campaign evaluation as a whole, “there is no tendency for those reporting more exposure to Campaign messages to hold more desirable beliefs.”<sup>98</sup>

Despite the fact that spokespersons for the ONDCP stress the complexity of teenage drug use and the need for careful, well researched approach so as not to “shoehorn a drug issue where it does not belong,”<sup>99</sup> and refrain from blaming the

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<sup>97</sup> *National Youth Media Campaign Media Plan Recommendation*  
<http://www.mediacampaign.org/publications/mediaplan/media10.html> last accessed 03/29/03

<sup>98</sup> *Executive Summary*. <http://www.mediacampaign.org/publications/westat5/highlights.pdf> last accessed 03/29/03

<sup>99</sup> *106<sup>th</sup> Congress session. Page 34*

entertainment industry for increasing use rates, television as an information providing, socializing medium is still seen as contributing to increased drug use and violence. Although there is a complete lack of data to support the sense of media glamorization of drugs that is oftentimes sighted as one of the founding reasons for the implementation of the Campaign, every step is being made both on the part of the ONDCP and other government organizations, as well as media outlets themselves to minimize or demonize drug use portrayal. These efforts follow a back and forth of lauding blame and praise upon the entertainment industry and is rather indicative of the not particularly sound state of drug abuse prevention in general, despite the best intentions. When drug use rates soar, the media are still the first to be blamed- from TV shows to Hollywood blockbusters and music videos, the entertainment industry is a formidable scapegoat for the drug problem, and one which politicians are quick to resort to. Some critics present this as more evidence of a lack of commitment to addressing the seriously difficult sources of drug use, and those which are much harder to eradicate than media messages- poverty and crime resulting from illegal drugs in particular, followed by a lack of effective, and honest rather than fear-based education, and accessible treatment options.

From the very beginning, the Campaign was criticized for spending such a considerable sum specifically on television ads, in light of the lack of conclusive, efficacious results of nearly indistinguishable ad campaigns, particularly those produced by PDFA.<sup>100</sup> Promoted by General Barry McCaffrey, and threatened to be dismantled by his successor, John Walters,<sup>101</sup> tax payer funding to sponsor this effort is certainly worthy of healthy scrutiny, especially seeing as how at its inception, the campaign outpaced

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<sup>100</sup> Suro, Washington Post. 1998

<sup>101</sup> Teinowitz, Advertising Age. 2002

advertising by such high profile companies as American Express and Nike, in terms of raw dollars.<sup>102</sup>

Influence by ONDCP in the media struggle is strongly felt. Allegations were even brought against the ONDCP in 2000 that the office was in the process of approving scripts for network shows for correct drug references/consequences.<sup>103</sup> On the other side of the spectrum, the Ad Council was cited by the FCC for failing to adhere to sponsorship guidelines in some of the anti-drug PSA's produced in concert with the ONDCP, where the organization requested special exemption, claiming that the sponsorship citation would interfere with the anti-drug ad's message.<sup>104</sup> Ironically enough, when the FCC sided with NORML (National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws) in saying that the anti-drug ads did indeed have to adhere to sponsorship laws, the Ad Council was shocked saying that tagging the PSA's with the ONDCP logo would diminish the potency of the message!<sup>105</sup>

*Drug War Issues- Good Politics, Bad Policy:*

The undertone of these examples is reflective of a general reluctance on the part of the involved agencies to achieve transparency of the issue of drug prevention, and sadly is characteristic of many other policies in the War on Drugs, which seems to only keep moving farther away from the moderate spectrum to more extreme and hard-lined policies that have been proven to have destructive rather than ameliorative effects.

Meanwhile, the drugs and terror approach has also been exploiting American

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<sup>102</sup> Suro, Washington Post. 1998

<sup>103</sup> 106<sup>th</sup> Congress

<sup>104</sup> Ad Council Challenges FCC Ruling [http://www.norml.org/index.cfm?Group\\_ID=5495](http://www.norml.org/index.cfm?Group_ID=5495)

<sup>105</sup> Teinowitz, "Ad Council balks at FCC's 'nutty' PSA ruling." Advertising Age 2002

vulnerability sentiments post September 11<sup>th</sup> , using, amongst other things, “people with health problems, drug addicts, as a scapegoat for terrorism.”<sup>106</sup>

No program of this scope and magnitude could have escaped the issues plaguing large multifaceted organizations which implemented it. Even the creation of the Campaign was suspect to begin with. Gathering instant support from both parties, the legislation authorizing the implementation of the program went through without a mark-up or an extra committee hearing, quite rare considering all the usual red tape surrounding the formation of new legislation.<sup>107</sup> Even in the escalation of the War on Drugs in 1986, Democrats quickly joined in the fight against drugs so the issue would not provide a Republican advantage,<sup>108</sup> once more illustrating that what is good politics may not necessarily be good public policy.

Despite the dismal reports and threats from the drug czar, the NYADMC struggles on. In 2002, both houses of Congress moved to cut funding for the Campaign, but adjourned before any action could be implemented.<sup>109</sup> So far, the Campaign has been spared the axe, and perhaps further reports may provide a reason to keep the program going, or else present indelible proof of its failure. At this point of course, too much is at stake with such a high-powered, high visibility campaign. Cutbacks would indicate an acknowledgement of defeat, something which is even more rare in the Drug War sphere. After all, old habits, and ideologies even more so, die hard. “What depresses me about media campaigns,” a public health professor at University of California, Berkley was quoted saying nearly 13 years ago, “is that when we use them instead of doing something

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<sup>106</sup> *Grimm, American Demographics. 2002*

<sup>107</sup> *106<sup>th</sup> Congress Session. 2000*

<sup>108</sup> *Shoemaker, page 24*

<sup>109</sup> *Teinowitz, “Drug ads fail another test.” Advertising Age. 2002*

that's politically controversial but substantive, they may do more harm than good. They may only be a band-aid, leaving people with the impression that they are doing something good."<sup>110</sup> A sentiment, which to some degree, he unwittingly shared with John Walters, who also felt anti-drug ads only create the illusion of action/prevention.

That is after all, the most controversial element of the whole strategy of anti-drug advertising, which essentially pours many millions of taxpayer dollars down the media drain just so a negligible number of kids can be convinced not to smoke pot. (Something which even today we have trouble proving is essentially harmful.) How great of a victory that is, and whether it is worth such a gargantuan effort is certainly contestable. The ONDCP/PDFA unwavering support in the effort does explain creation of such seemingly farfetched themes as the ones current anti-drug advertisements portray, and the spending of most of the Campaign funds on anti-marijuana ads rather than more socially deleterious substances, alcohol and tobacco, for example.

The problem with this Media Campaign is not that advertising and public service campaigns don't work, there is plenty of evidence to show that it does, at least as far as many other social issues are concerned, and many decades of media experience has turned convincing the public of various practices into an art form. However, the hard-line, zero tolerance ideology which has prevented honest communication on the topic of drugs and drug abuse from officials serving in public office, has also prevented more effective tactics, such as social implication focus, and resistance skills training, without the additives of moral and physical harm implication. There have certainly been efforts made to present the problem as the complex, serious creature it is, the ad "Long Way Home," which portrayed an African-American kid running home through the back alleys

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<sup>110</sup> *Rothenberg*, NY Times. 1990

of the ghetto, where drug dealers, not the educators who chant “Just Say No”, are the prevailing reality, was one of the greatest of all anti-drug advertisements. It even won the most prestigious advertising award- the Grand Effie, in 1993. However, for whatever reason, that ad was one of a kind. No ads which followed this historical spot have even come close to matching its depth and perception of the endemic social problems surrounding the illegal use of substances by America’s youth.

Ever since the beginning of the National Campaign, There has been an ongoing fight to include warnings against tobacco and alcohol use in its message. In fact, upon its inception the funding granted for the program stipulated that the funds be used to fight alcohol and tobacco abuse alongside those of the illegal substances. However, despite multifaceted efforts to do so, the Campaign never officially included such advertising, partly, because such backing was seen as diverging the funds available to fight “real” drugs, diluting the strength of the anti-drug message.<sup>111</sup> Partly, also because this nation has been fighting a hard ideological battle between that of good drugs and bad drugs. Being one of the heaviest medicated first world nations, with a multitude of legal drugs available to ‘cure’ anything from sexual dysfunction to shopping addiction, and ADHD, we have had to create cultural myths to perpetuate the artificial barrier separating condoned legal use from demonized, illegal consumption. The persistent irony in this division is apparent in everything from the way pain patients are treated, to the names of pharmaceutical corporations who fund the anti-drug crusade under the guise of public service and the work of PDFA.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Teinowitz, “MADD’s demands for equal ad time fall on deaf ears.” *Advertising Age*. 1999

<sup>112</sup> Cotts, “The Partnership: Hard sell in the drug war.” *The Nation*. 1992

In the end, until there is a more sustained effort to steer the Campaign back to the realm of honesty and complexity, raising real issues and arguments, instead of half-hearted, half-truth scare tactics, not to mention engaging a serious look at what it is in our culture which makes drug use so appealing and socially entrenched, beyond mere media influences, future evaluations of such media drug prevention efforts will come to the same disheartening results.

*Self Reflection:*

Discovering the potential and irony of the way drugs were treated in the United States as a teenager, I at first naively believed that drug reform activism belonged solely in the camp of crazy Libertarians and self-professed druggies, who naturally wanted the government to simply leave them be to reap both the consequences and benefits of their activities; using our nation's prized ideals of freedom as a shield against unnecessary intrusion into their bodies and backyards. Interestingly enough, my innate curiosity led me to discover even greater mysteries and absurdities as far as drug use and drug prevention were concerned, both as a student of human organization and interaction and as an unconverted D.A.R.E. graduate. My multifaceted academic interests led me to discover the wonders of the field of sociology, and so this project presents the culmination of both my interest and foundation in drug policy and cultural curiosity.

Although I have pursued the topic numerous times throughout my Tufts career, exploring comparative harm minimization strategies for drug prevention in Canada and Australia, as well as full semester's worth of investigation of the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws (NORML), in addition to countless personal

reflections and discoveries, this has been the first time I have been able to delve so deeply and freely into the subject, while exposing the innate inadequacies and dilemmas facing our legislature and communities as far as drug prevention is concerned. With the final passing of the R.A.V.E. act mere days ago (a bill which puts venue owners and promoters at risk for arrest for any drugs found on their premises, regardless of whether they take stringent precautionary methods against the presence of drugs, and so threatens the entire music, not just electronic community), the concerns and issues raised in this piece of research are even more important to address.

Personally, this has been an incredibly fulfilling and intellectually satisfying journey, one which confirms my predisposition to expanding my experience in the realm of drug policy reform as my completion of my Bachelor's diploma looms nearer, and opportunities to truly engage myself in this type of work emerge. My deepest thanks go out to all my academic and personal advisors and confidantes for lending their energy and expertise in the completion of this project, of which I am immensely proud. I hope it provides an honest and engaging glimpse into the nature of public policy in our great though anxious nation, as well as a reassessment of the way in which we perceive our public interest, drug prevention, and the media.

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