

2006

"Just Say No," or, "Just Do It?" What Impact Have Major, National, Anti-Drug Campaigns, Conducted between the Years 1987-1991, had on the Decisions of America's Young Adults?

Jill E. Surdyka

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**“Just Say No,” or, “Just Do It?”**

**What impact, have major, national, anti-drug campaigns, conducted between the years  
1987-1991, had on the decisions of America’s young adults?**

**By**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in Corporate and Public Communication  
Seton Hall University  
2005

### **Abstract**

Drug abuse has been a problem among America's youth for many years. During the Reagan administration, the issue was made a priority and the fight against drugs began. In recognition of these important issues, the United States government initiated the anti-drug advertising solution. The purpose of the advertising campaigns was to prevent the use of drugs amongst teens. Research funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse was used by the Partnership for a Drug Free America (PDFA) to develop a new series of anti-drug public service announcements. These included the "Just Say No" campaign and the brain on drugs campaign.

After the launch of the advertising campaign, a revolutionary movement began and the anti-drug advertisements became a part of pop culture. Even now, 15 years after the advertisements were introduced to the public, the slogans and advertising images are remembered, understood, and garner an opinionated response.

There have been multiple studies and extensive research completed to determine whether or not the advertisements changed potential drug abuse behavior. Those studies contradict each other, however. Some studies say that the advertising worked, while others say it did not. There have not been any studies similar to this where interviews of the audiences are conducted 15 years later. The following research helps to resolve the question of effectiveness of the anti-drug advertising campaign.

### **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank those individuals who made it possible for me to complete this study and my degree. To begin, I want to recognize the many Seton Hall University professors and students who provided input and support throughout this process. I would also like to acknowledge my boss and colleagues at Weber Shandwick who have been incredibly understanding and reassuring throughout my graduate studies. I could not have completed this program without their patience. Lastly, I need to express my deep gratitude to my wonderful family and friends for their continuous encouragement.

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## “Just Say No,” or, “Just Do It?”

### Chapter I

*Nancy Reagan introduced the country to “Just Say No” and the Nike brand brought us “Just Do it.” These two similar phrases have come to represent very compelling advertising campaigns in American culture and maintain high brand recall. The two slogan’s intentions, however, could not be more different. While “Just do it” refers to sneakers, the phrase “Just Say No” has become one of the most famous call-to-action advertising slogans of all time.*

#### **Introduction**

A man stands next to a hot skillet on a stove, points to an egg and says, “This is your brain.” He cracks the egg and dumps the yolk into the hot skillet. As the egg begins to fry and sizzle, he concludes, “This is your brain on drugs. Any questions?”

This famous anti-drug commercial has become a pop culture icon and affected at least two generation’s views on drug use. In fact, America’s advertising community has recognized the “brain on drugs” advertisement as one of the most influential ads of all time. While memorable, it is still not clear as to whether the campaign succeeded in it’s goal. Some analysts say we are winning the war on drugs and that the “brain on drugs” campaign analogy was legitimate. Others say the government is not doing enough and believe the advertisement’s premise was fictional. For example, according to data from the 2003 *National Household Survey on Drug Use and Health*, “110 million Americans age 12 or older (46% of the population) reported illicit drug use at least once in their lifetime; 15% reported use of a drug with in the past year; 8% reported use of a drug with in the past month.” (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2005)

The magnitude of the drug abuse problem in the United States is staggering and one of its biggest issues. Not only does it affect one's health, but the use of drugs also can be linked to crime and the breakdown of families. Research conducted by National Institute for Drug Abuse (NIDA) suggests that teens who use drugs risk harming every aspect of their lives as they mature. Additionally, early drug use is more likely to result in failure to complete high school and a premature imposition of adult responsibilities such as marriage and parenthood. (Patterson, 1995, p. 5)

The prevention of illicit drug use among youths and adults has been one of government's top priorities for many years. In recognition of these issues, the United States government created the anti-drug advertising solution. In the late 1980s, research funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse was used by the Partnership for a Drug Free America (PDFA) to develop a new series of anti-drug public service announcements. These anti-drug advertisements became a part of pop culture and started a revolutionary movement. The purpose of the advertising campaigns was to prevent the use of drugs amongst teens.

Traditionally, advertising and promotions are used to increase the demand for a product or idea. There are some instances, however, when these same marketing tactics are used to *demarket*, or decrease the demand for a product or service. Demarketing efforts are commonly used when the demand for products or services is greater than the available supply, or when the product is harmful to individuals. In situations where the goal is to reduce the demand for harmful products, such as alcohol, cigarettes and illegal drugs, demarketing efforts focus primarily on the use of mass communication advertising campaigns. (Block et al., 1999, p. 1)

Some advertising is not important and life changing, while other advertising campaigns are meant to alter one's actions and save lives. The very optimistic demarketing goal of the PDFA's advertising campaign was to prevent kids from doing drugs for the first time.



I have a vested interest in this topic because I was a child in the 1980s. This means that I was included in the mix of the PDFA campaign's target audience. Being a kid in the 1980s was very encouraging as technology was on the brink of greatness and a child's imagination was his or her ticket to hours of play. Before the internet, my childhood days were filled with riding my bike, playing with Barbies, and watching my favorite cartoon *Thundercats*. I also remember being exposed to anti-drug public service messages and the catch phrase, "Just Say No." However, at the age of 7, I did not fully understand what I was supposed to say "No" to. Of course, as I got older and as I watched commercials with eggs on a frying pan, I began to understand.

I truly became aware of drugs and what it meant to use drugs in my sixth grade DARE (Drug Awareness Resistance Education) classes. Officer Lacey came into my classroom every Wednesday afternoon to talk to us about drugs, the harm they can do to a person's body, and how to just say no. At the end of the semester, we had to write a paper about what we learned. I was chosen from my class to read my essay at our graduation. I remember my opening paragraph verbatim, "What are drugs? Why do people use drugs? Where do they come from? I had these questions and many more before I entered the DARE program." The DARE program gave all of the advertisements and messages I had heard growing up new meaning.

When it came time to declare a thesis topic, I began to think about the advertising I was exposed to as a child, specifically anti-drug messages. I have always been fascinated with advertising, especially advertising to children, and its lasting effect on people. Kids are bombarded with commercials and are being marketed to every day. An advertiser's goal is to make their products or ideas appealing to children. Unfortunately for advertisers, children are a difficult audience to convince.

When the anti-drug campaigns were introduced, did children really understand what they were watching? Did they care? Were the national anti-drug campaigns associated with a change in adolescents' drug use behavior? Specifically, was there a relationship between adolescents' recall of exposure to anti-drug advertising on their probability of trying drugs? I know my opinion, but I would like to learn how others felt as well. The following research will help to answer those questions.

### **Research Question**

The objective of this paper is to examine the anti-drug movement and related advertising campaigns between the years 1987-1991, and evaluate the campaign's effectiveness. I intend to learn if people believe the campaigns influenced their own decisions about doing drugs later in life. Did people remember the ad campaigns from childhood? Were their decisions to do drugs or not to do drugs influenced by what they learned, saw, and remembered? The difference between this study and other similar studies is this thesis surveys the audience 15 years after the advertising campaign was introduced. This study will conclude whether or not the campaign registered with the audience and will reveal the audience's opinions.

My primary research question is:

What impact, have major, national, anti-drug campaigns, conducted between the years 1987-1991, had on the actual decisions of America's young adults?

### **Subsidiary Questions**

In order to research this topic effectively, there are a few additional questions I need to address.

1. What were the anti-drug programs in the years 1987-1991?

2. What prompted the start of the campaigns?
3. Who were the campaign's target audiences?
4. Did the campaign impact the designated age group?
5. What are the reasons why kids try drugs?
6. Should the government use other forms of media to reach kids?
7. Was the government's spending on this campaign worth it?

### **Limitations**

This study will be researching the beliefs and opinions of the campaign's target audience. It will evaluate whether the campaigns resonated with the audience. It will not focus on the background of each survey participant, nor will it take into account any drug related encounters with the law. Anonymity is essential.

I will ask questions about demographics in my survey. For the purpose of this study, demographics mean educational background, family income, gender, and lifestyle. While they are questions in my survey, my conclusions will not directly reflect those results. In addition, I will not be researching whether family dynamics, such as growing up in a single parent household, had an influence in drug use.

I will not be specifically researching:

1. Whether demographics have any effects on drug use.
2. Whether family dynamics have any influence on drug use.
3. Whether there was incidence of teenage addiction, i.e. lawsuits, rehab visits, etc.
4. Any current advertising campaigns and/or initiatives.

**Purpose of Study**

I will address the research question and subsidiary questions with an analysis consisting of both past and present literature on the subject of the war on drugs. I believe it is necessary to understand the history of the anti-drug campaigns and why the initiatives began before trying to understand why people made the choices they made later in life.

**Need for Study**

It is the goal of this study to provide the necessary evidence that suggests whether the multi-million dollar anti-drug advertising campaign sponsored by the PDFA truly accomplished its goals. There have been many studies conducted by the PDFA, Monitoring the Future, and NIDA focusing on the effects of the advertising directly after it was introduced into the mainstream in 1987. There have not, however, been any studies similar to this where interviews of the audiences are conducted 15 years later. The outcome of this study will either affirm or contradict the government's claim that anti-drug advertising had a long term effect on their audiences.

Based on the findings in this study, a conclusion will be drawn as to whether the government's spending merited the amount of money spent. The media have been used as a strategic weapon to target adolescents and communicate information about the dangers of adolescent drug use. Should the money spent on the campaigns been used in another way? Should a different approach to reaching children be implemented? The outcome of this study will support answers to those questions.

The PDFA's efforts from March 1987 through the end of 1991 had resulted in the total of \$1.1 billion in media, professional services and time donated to Partnership messages, making it the largest public service campaign in history. Given the magnitude of donated dollars and time,

it is important to continue to explore evidence that such campaigns accomplish its goals- in the past and in the future. (Patterson, 1995, p. 13)

## **Objectives**

I believe that through the design and completion of such a study, there will be a positive addition to the growing materials on the topic of teenage drug use and the influence of advertising. The first objective of this study is to provide the reader with a background understanding of the anti-drug advertising campaigns. The second objective is to provide the reader with insights from the campaign's target audience. My final objective is to provide the reader with a guide as to whether advertising is an appropriate medium to approach children about drug use. The underlying themes in this study are to provide the reader with solid foundations of the war on drugs and the government's way of combat.

## **Definition of Terms**

**DARE-** Drug Abuse Resistance Education

**DPNA-** Drug Prevention Network of the Americas

**Drug-** *n.* 1. A substance used therapeutically in the treatment of disease or illness. 2. A narcotic, esp. one that is addictive (Webster's, 1996, p. 214)

**NIDA-** National Institute for Drug Abuse

**ONDCP-** Office of National Drug Control Policy

**PDFA-** Partnership for a Drug Free America

**SOA-** Strength of Association

## Chapter II

### Introduction

Ronald Reagan was elected president in 1980 and served two terms. During their time in the White House, Ronald and Nancy Reagan encouraged and supported a nationwide effort to reduce the demand for drugs. Their strategy was to increase Americans knowledge about drugs and to change Americans attitudes and behavior. In 1983, they helped launch the nation-wide “Just Say No” drug prevention campaign, that even today is recognized by drug prevention experts as the most effective and far-reaching campaign against drugs ever promoted in this country. In 1986, the Reagan’s helped take the anti-drug initiative a step further and inspired the establishment of the National Media Advertising Partnership for a Drug Free America to spread the drug prevention message. (DPNA, 2005) The partnership’s most notable campaign was the “brain on drugs” commercial.

### Two Sides of the Argument

Some research, such as studies done by the PDFA, suggests that anti-drug advertisements influenced behavior when teens were confronted with drugs. Others claim, including research done by Dr. Carson Wagner- Assistant Professor at the University of Texas at Austin, that the advertisements did not work. While my thesis question is to ultimately determine whether the advertisements had an influence later in life, understanding the ads initial effects will help to form the conclusion.

### Just Say No

PDFA research findings validate that anti-drug ads did in fact connect with teens. The ads can be recalled and the knowledge they impart is recollected. Some studies even reveal a

decrease in intention to use illicit drugs. (Wagner, 2005) In 1999, Barry McCaffery, director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy, said the percentage of youths who stayed away from drugs increased 8 percent because of the ads. (Karl, 1999)

In addition to anti-drug organization's findings, independent experts call ads from the Partnership for a Drug-Free America "a worthwhile investment." In a study published in the August 2002 *American Journal of Public Health*, researchers found that anti-drug advertising is associated with a reduced probability of marijuana and cocaine/crack use among adolescents. This team, including researchers from Yale University, New York University, the London Business School, and Baruch College, evaluated the effectiveness of drug education messages from the PDFA from 1987-1991. The researchers said that by 1990, "after three years of PDFA ads, approximately 9.25 percent fewer adolescents were using marijuana." The team also noted that the decrease came at a time when anti-drug ads had increasing levels of media financial support and thus were seen more often. (PDFA, 2004) Although the advertisements were not as effective in deterring the adolescents who were already using illicit substances, there was a slight impact. (Brady, 2002) "Given the results," the researchers said, "this increase (in spending) appears to have been a worthwhile investment." (PDFA)

Previously, the February 2001 issue of the *Journal* reported television advertising and the "Just Say No" campaign contributed to a significant decline in marijuana use among teenagers. Research funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) chronicled the impact of TV ads on teens described as "sensation seekers"—adolescents attracted to risky activity and behavior. Conducted by Dr. Philip Palmgreen and a team of researchers at the University of Kentucky, the study tracked the impact of ad campaigns that ran in select counties in Kentucky. When completed, the study showed a 26.7 percent decline in marijuana use among sensation-seeking teens. (PDFA, 2004)

Other research draws similar conclusions. In “The Impact of Anti-Drug Advertising,” researchers for the Department of Pediatrics at The Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine found that among middle and high school students exposed to anti-drug advertising, the majority identified a positive impact of the ads on their knowledge, beliefs and attitudes pertaining to drug use. Further, 75 percent of these students perceived that the ads had a deterrent impact on their own actual or intended drug use. The authors concluded that their “findings suggest that anti-drug advertising serves as a deterrent to youth substance abuse.” (PDFA, 2004)

National survey results on drug use from the Monitoring the Future Study, 1975-1992, suggest that in the years following the initiation of the campaign, consistent declines in lifetime drug use were observed. This suggests that the ads may have had some future influence as well. (See table A) (Patterson, 1995, p. 29)

**Table A.**

*Trends in Lifetime Prevalence of Any Illicit Drug Use for 12<sup>th</sup> Graders*

*(Percent who ever used)*

1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992
61.6	60.6	57.6	56.6	53.6	50.9	47.9	44.1	40.7

Barry McCaffery, director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy agreed that the ads changed attitudes towards drug use. “The percentage of youth who said they were scared of taking drugs increased during the ... evaluation period,” he said. “Teens said that the four ads targeted to their age group made them less likely to try or use drugs.”(Associated Press, 1999)

Howard Simon, assistant director of public affairs for the Partnership for a Drug-Free America, said he believes the long-running ad campaign got the message across. “People will not



immediately say that advertising had an impact on them, but it is apparent that it gets through and that is how we (PDFA) feel about the anti-drug ads.” Simon said that the commercial was not only effective, but also was well recognized. “*TV Guide* named it (brain on drugs) one of the top 100 ads of all time...,” he said. “Ultimately it provided good persuasive information to try and change attitudes about drug behavior.” (Alexander, 2000)

Possibly the most influential research are the various college focus groups with young adults. “The fried egg commercial really scared me when I was in high school. I remember picturing that egg in the frying pan and thinking that it wasn’t worth it,” said Modrek, 21, a Los Angeles native. “Drugs weren’t hidden. The opportunities were there, I mean they still are, but I don’t take them.” (Alexander, 2000)

### **Just Do It**

Carson B. Wagner, an assistant professor in the department of advertising at the University of Texas at Austin, found research that suggests that many anti-drug ads are having the wrong effects on teens, possibly increasing the likelihood for experimentation with drugs. One suggested theory as to why the PDFA has received positive feedback about the influence of its ads is because drug use is an uncomfortable topic and people do not readily admit to past or present use. This means that in order to conform to social norms, research participants may intentionally or unintentionally misrepresent themselves when reporting their attitudes, resulting in exaggerated estimates of anti-drug effectiveness. (Wagner, 2005)

A 1999 study from the Institute for Social Research found that despite teens enormous exposure to anti-drug ads, adolescents’ perceived risk of illicit drugs has rapidly decreased and their drug use sharply increased since 1991. (Wagner, 2005)

A study by the Libertarian Party claims the commercials encouraged children to do drugs because it created an “everybody’s doing it effect” or the “forbidden fruit phenomenon.” This assumption is also called the “boomerang effect.”

While the advertiser’s main goal was to prevent kids from using drugs for the first time, research shows that they failed to connect with their secondary audience- teen drug users. The Stern Business School’s study concluded that the recall of PDFA’s anti-drug advertising had little or no impact on the volume of use among existing drug users. This same study, however, did say that their results are consistent with the hypothesis that anti-drug advertising reduced the probability of marijuana and crack/cocaine use among adolescents.

Survey data from 1987 to 1991, indicates that increases in amounts of anti-drug advertising are associated with decreases in teenage drug use. During this time period, media financial support for anti-drug advertising increased, from a low of \$115 million in 1987 to a high of \$365 million in 1991. The study also concluded that after three years of PDFA advertising, approximately 9.25 percent fewer adolescents were using marijuana and 3.6 percent fewer were using crack/cocaine. This study’s results were consistent with PDFA’s goals. That said, the research also suggested that the recall of anti-drug advertising is not associated with adolescent’s decisions regarding how much marijuana or cocaine/crack to use among those already using each drug. (Block et al., 2002)

Possibly the most vivid research are quotes directly from teenagers. For example, 17 year old Jennifer told CNN, “Once you are surrounded by it and thinking about doing it anyway, and there is nothing better to do... seeing a commercial is not going to change you mind that much. You may think about it for a couple of minutes, but it’s not going to impact your decision making.” (Karl, 1999)

“When I saw people that were on the high school honor roll smoking pot, I realized that the commercial’s message was false,” said Lubitz, 21, “I remember thinking, ‘When are their brains going to fry?’ ” (Alexander, 2000) Lubitz continued and said the ad didn’t discourage her from experimenting with drugs- instead it stirred her curiosity. “The ad wasn’t helpful from doing anything,” Lubitz said. “I think that a scare tactic acts more of a dare than it does actually scare kids away from using drugs.” (Alexander, 2000)

### **How it all Began**

In order to understand the nature of the war on drugs, it is necessary to understand the history and reasons why the government began its fight.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Americans were passive and even endorsed the use of illicit drugs. (Haynes, 2005) In turn, this attitude fostered a country where drugs were not only tolerated, but accepted. By the 1980s, there were massive amounts of illegal drugs and drug pushers, and millions of people were victimized. In addition, the criminal system was overburdened and the health of people declined. (Haynes) Because of this, the government had to do something to fight back and the anti-drug revolution was born.

### **The Reagan Reign**

Ronald and Nancy Reagan helped spark and encourage the national movement against drugs. The movement resulted in dramatic declines of illicit drug use in America and around the world. (DPNA, 2005) The couple was committed to help reverse the permissive attitudes in the 1960s and 1970s and extinguish all thoughts that drug use was glamorous, harmless and victimless. Their power also influenced the media, causing Hollywood to reduce its focus on drug use. The Reagan's believed that the nation needed community based solutions to the drug problems.

Because of this, they supported grass roots movements focusing on parents and their influence.

“In this crusade, let us not forget who we are. Drug abuse is a repudiation of everything America is. The destructiveness and human wreckage mock our heritage,” said President Ronald Reagan on September 14, 1986. (DPNA)

President Reagan sponsored The White House Conference on Drug Abuse. As a result, across the nation community anti-drug initiatives, youth programs, and drug-free school programs appeared. In addition, drug use was no longer tolerated in the workplace or in the Armed forces. For the first time, the nation spoke with the one voice proclaiming that drugs were wrong and harmful. On June 24, 1982, President Ronald Reagan said “We’re rejecting the helpless attitude that drug use is so rampant that we are defenseless to do anything about it. We’re taking down the surrender flag that has flown over of many drug efforts; we’re running up the battle flag.” The result of this movement was that illicit drug use was cut in half: from 25 million to 11 million users between 1979 and 1992. Crime, drug related hospital admissions, and highway deaths also declined. (DPNA, 2005)

Throughout her time in the White House, Nancy Reagan’s special project was fighting drug and alcohol abuse among youth. Mrs. Reagan first became impressed by the need to educate young people about the dangers of drug use during a campaign visit to Daytop Village, New York, in 1980. She “was stunned to find out just how large the problem of drug abuse really is,” and was “impressed by what (she) saw at Daytop Village- children who were climbing out of the mess that they had made of their lives because of their dependency on drugs.” She later returned to Daytop Village to explain how concerned she was about the problem, and how she wished to help. (Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation and Library, 2005)

Mrs. Reagan traveled nearly 200,000 miles throughout the United States and several countries in conjunction with her campaign to fight substance abuse. She appeared on numerous

talk shows, taped public service announcements, wrote guest articles, and visited prevention programs and rehabilitation centers to talk to young people. She also appeared on a special anti-drug episode of NBC's "Different Strokes," co-hosted a special drug related edition of "Good Morning America," and narrated two PBS specials, "The Chemical People" and a follow-up program, "Chemical People II" which encouraged communities to organize against drug abuse. (Scholastic, 2005)

In an interview with *Good Morning America* in 1981, she said her "best role is to try to bring public awareness, particularly parental awareness, to the problems of drug abuse" because "understanding what drugs can do to your children, understanding peer pressure and understanding why they turn to drugs is... the first step in solving the problem." (Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation and Library, 2005)

Then in April, 1985, Nancy Reagan expanded her drug awareness campaign to an international level by inviting First Ladies from around the world to attend a two-day briefing on the subject of youth drug abuse. (Scholastic, 2005)

After the success of the first meeting, Mrs. Reagan hosted a second international drug conference at the United Nations on October 21, 1985. On the first page of the conference's brochure, Mrs. Reagan wrote:

*Dear Friends:*

*Welcome to New York City and thank you for joining me for our First Ladies meeting on drug abuse at the United Nations. It means so much to know you share my concern about this terrible problem, and I admire your interest in learning about ways to solve it.*

*As I've said many times, drug abuse knows no boundaries. It crosses all lines - geographical, racial, political, and economic. There is no one here today whose country isn't affected by the inevitable sorrow and tragedy drug abuse causes. Not only can it tear down*

*an entire nation, it also brings danger into the lives of our most precious resource, our children. It is up to our generation to protect them and provide for them a drug-free world in which to live. We must act now, not tomorrow, or the next day.*

*Your presence here today helps confirm my belief that there is great hope. With our combined efforts and those of our friends and neighbors from all corners of the world, we will defeat this problem.*

*I look forward to our discussions today and working with you in the months ahead.*

*Sincerely,*

*Nancy Reagan*

(Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation and Library, 2005)

Nancy Reagan was a leader in the crusade for a drug free America and was honorary chairperson of the National Federation of Parents for Drug Free Youth. Throughout the “Just Say No” campaign, she was responsible for the establishment of thousands of parent and youth groups across the country. On February 29, 1988, Nancy Reagan was quoted in saying “The causal drug user cannot morally escape responsibility for the actions of drug traffickers and dealers. I am saying that if you are a casual drug user. You are an accomplice to murder.”

(DPNA, 2005)

Towards the end of Reagan’s term as president on May 18, 1988, he said “Illegal drug use is the foremost concern in our country. And frankly, as I finish my final year in office and look ahead, I worry that excessive drug politics might undermine effective drug policy. If America’s anti-drug effort tripped up in partnership, if we permit politics to determine policy, it will mean a disaster for our future and that of our children.” (DPNA, 2005)

After leaving the White House in 1989, Mrs. Reagan established the Nancy Reagan Foundation to continue her campaign to educate people about the dangers of substance abuse.

She is known for traveling domestically and internationally speaking out on the harmful effects of drugs. (Scholastic, 2005)

The Reagan's left an impression on the country during their time in the White House and well after. In 1988, the *New York Times* said "No president has spoken out more against drugs than President Reagan. No administration has signed more anti drugs treaties or spent more money to stem the flow of drugs into this country." (DPNA, 2005)

### **Why do Teens Use Drugs?**

Before the anti-drug ad campaign was conceptualized, the government had to determine why people, especially adolescents, would initially start to use drugs. The drug-use decision involves a series of tradeoffs: the role of peer pressure versus parental guidance, and the fear of negative consequences verses the desire to experiment. While not all kids are the same, main factors and influencers according to 1999 research done by Block, Morwitz, Putsis, and Sen in the decision to do drugs include:

*Perceived susceptibility.* A characteristic of many teens is the feeling of invulnerability to harm. Most researchers agree that teenagers share a feeling of immunity from life's risks. One step in motivating adolescents to decrease drug use is to convince them of their personal susceptibility to harm. The more adolescents perceive themselves to be susceptible to the negative consequences of drug abuse, the less likely they will use drugs.

*Perceived severity.* The beliefs concerning the perceived seriousness of a health problem vary across segments of society. For teenage drug use, the severity of the problem encompasses the dangers of addiction as well as the effects of drug abuse on the adolescent's academic performance and personal and family relationships. In general, the more teens perceive the consequences of drug abuse to be severe, the less likely they will be to use.

*Attitudes toward drugs.* General attitudes towards drugs serve as either perceived benefits or costs to drug use. Teens who have an unfavorable attitude toward drugs, i.e. perceive that drugs are bad, are less likely to use drugs, while teens with favorable attitudes, i.e. drugs make a person feel good, are more likely to use. Teens may have a negative attitude towards drugs because they may believe that drugs make a person act foolishly. On the other hand, some teens may see drugs as a way to relax, a way to feel good, get away from problems, give energy, help with anger and frustration, or help to gain insights or understanding. Thus, the more favorable teen's attitudes are towards drugs, the higher their likelihood will be to do drugs. The teens with more unfavorable attitudes tend to stay away.

*Attitudes toward drug users.* Depending on the attitudes of the teens, the perception of drug users varies. Teens that have negative attitudes towards drug users, i.e., drug users are losers, are less likely to use drugs. Alternatively, teens that think drug users are cool, have more of a probability of using.

*Peer pressure.* Often times, teens use drugs to fit in with the group they like. Teen drug users tend to have friends who are drug users, and those friendships have a strong influence on drug abuse. The most cited reason for drug use among teens is to have a good time with friends. Similarly, friends who do not use drugs also exert peer pressure. This pressure is not to use. The more friends teens have who use drugs, the higher risk they are for using. The fewer friends a teen has who use drugs lower the risk.

*Anti-drug advertising.* Anti-drug advertising is an external, instigating cue that motivates a reduction in illegal drug use. If anti-drug advertising is effective, then re-call of anti-drug ads should be associated with increased disutility of using drugs.

*Drug availability.* The supply of drugs is a significant factor in drug use. The limited availability of drugs will lead to reduced drug consumption. This suggests that lower drug



availability will be associated with less drug use and the greater availability can be associated with increased drug use.

*Addictive properties of drugs.* In general, past behavior is likely to be a good predictor of current behavior. Adolescents who were addicted to drugs in the past will have higher utility for using drugs than those who were not addicted in the past.

*Demographic covariates.* Demographic variables like race and sex are often used as predictive factors to help explain drug behavior.

*Price.* The price of drugs has an impact on drug use behavior. The availability of money enables or disables the purchase of illicit drugs. (Block et al., 1999, p. 10)

To summarize, it was proposed that the probability of trying drugs is lower for adolescents who: 1. perceive the consequences of drug use to be severe, 2. feel susceptible to these consequences, 3. have a generally unfavorable attitude towards drugs, 4. have few friends who use drugs, 5. were not previously addicted to drugs. (Block et al., 1999, p. 31)

Carson B. Wagner, an assistant professor in the department of advertising at the University of Texas at Austin has a private theory on why teens turn to drugs. This theory is called Strength of Association, SOA. Carson said “When a situation forces someone to make a spontaneous decision, they will rely on their internal, automatic processes, or gut feelings, about drugs. These associations stored in memory are called ‘Strength of Association’ or SOA’s. It is these SOA’s that take over when we make quick decisions or aren’t motivated to carefully think through the choice at hand. And we need to better understand how SOA’s work in order to create more effective anti-drug ads.” Experimentation demonstrated that the higher the motivation to watch an anti-drug ad (such as one that grabs your attention with an edgy, in-your-face message or one that runs during a prime, high audience timeslot) the more positive the teens’ SOA toward

drugs, meaning the more likely they would be to try drugs when faced with the choice. (Wagner, 2005)

### **Media is the Answer**

While there are many outside influencers towards teens and their decisions to use drugs, in general, advertising and mass media are well-suited to reaching adolescents. Adolescents are highly-prized audiences targeted by advertising and frequently thought to be readily influenced by the media. Research related to preventing substance abuse among teens suggests that mass media holds the most promise for increasing awareness, conveying knowledge of prevention skills, and is capable of motivating adolescents to change their behavior. (Patterson, 1995, p. 26)

Advertising helps consumers, especially adolescents, interpret their experiences. It provides cues and clues to help consumers understand and appreciate their feelings. In this way, it can change the nature of the consumer's response. (Braun-LaTour, 2004) Advertisers believe that a one-on-one correspondence exists between what is seen and what can later be retrieved. Once that memory reaches long-term storage, it is always accessible. Then, once a message or image is placed in our long-term memory, it seems to never be forgotten. (Braun-LaTour, 2004) It can be argued that this was the case with teenagers and the very memorable, "brain on drugs" advertisement.

In addition to mass media's memorable persuasiveness, there were other advantages that encouraged this form of outreach as a tool for drug prevention. These areas include:

*Cost and coverage.* Once it is produced, the cost of a message is low per receiver.

*Repetition.* While there is little research about the number of messages that are needed to achieve a given effect on a target audience, it is known that the more an ad is observed, the more likely it will stick in the minds of the audience.

*Family access.* Watching television has become a family activity in many homes.

Through television and radio, prevention efforts might simultaneously reach both teens and their families stimulating dialog between the family members.

*Special populations.* Low income and minority families watch and listen to more television and radio than do affluent families. This media will help reach those hard to reach target audiences. (Patterson, 1995, p. 32)

### **The First Warrior**

One of the first anti-drug campaigns introduced was in 1983 by the NIDA. The “Just Say No” campaign was aimed at young teenagers and their parents. This campaign included radio and television public service announcements, a music video, print ads, posters, and brochures that reached millions of teens and their parents. Factors important to the success of the “Just Say No” campaign were its credibility and the perceived usefulness of the information communicated. The campaign included messages informing teens and their parents that drug use had dire consequences. Teens were also given helpful and supportive advice on dealing with peer pressure. “Just Say No” went beyond being a media campaign but became a way of life. (Patterson, 1995, p. 29)

### **PDFA Joins the Fight**

In 1986 the Partnership for a Drug-Free America (PDFA) was established to help curb the increasing teenage drug use documented during the late 1970s and early to mid-1980s. Its advertisements targeted teenagers with messages designed to achieve the primary goal of preventing trial as well as reducing illegal drug use.

Backed by the American Association of Advertising Agencies, the PDFA is a nonprofit coalition of communication, health, medical and educational professionals working to reduce illicit drug use and help people live healthy, drug-free lives. By utilizing the pro-bono work of the country's best advertising, public relations and interactive agencies, and the donated time and space of major media, the PDFA created the largest public service campaign in the nation's history. Over the years, the PDFA has received more than \$3 billion in donated media. (PDFA, 2004)

The PDFA's advertisements have turned into pop culture icons. Perhaps the most well known is "This is your brain... this is your brain on drugs." In fact, the "brain on drugs" advertisement became so persuasive in the minds of Americans that it prompted complaints from a trade organization representing the dairy producers of America because it used a fried egg to demonstrate the hazards of drug use and abuse. (Patterson, 1995, p. 31)

The objective of the PDFA's campaign was to provide at least one anti-drug message per household per day. The reasoning was: more exposure to anti-drug advertising leads to a lower probability of drug use, while reduced exposure to anti-drug advertising leads to a greater probability of drug use. PDFA research from 1992 suggests that adults and teenagers exposed frequently to drug education advertising have stronger, negative attitudes against drugs. (Patterson, 1995, p. 31) Advertisers know that the more times one receives information, the more familiar it becomes and the more likely it will be taken as fact. (Braun-LaTour, 2004)

## Chapter III

### Purpose of Survey

While there is research on the anti-drug campaign's results directly after it was launched, there have not been any studies focusing on the influence of anti-drug advertising 15 years later. In order to do this, a survey most accurately and easily reaches the target audience and gets responses in the most concise and direct way. A survey enables the compilation of the most candid data from the most relevant sources. Other options could have entailed literary searches or an advertisement observation. However, it is believed the most pertinent information comes from evoking the memories of people who grew up as the target for these campaigns.

Advertisements that are emotionally engaging have been found to effect long-term memory. (Braun-LaTour, 2004) The intent of the anti-drug advertisements was to influence adolescents and for those adolescents to remember that drugs are harmful. In turn, when offered drugs later in life, the advertiser's intents were that teens would not do drugs due to their memory of the advertisements. Researchers have also found that information presented as a picture, such as the frying eggs visual, is more memorable than words. (Braun-LaTour)

A person's memories can be explicit or implicit. An explicit memory entails a deliberate, conscious search of memory for the ad information, and implicit memory entails a response bias caused by the nondeliberate, unconscious retrieval of the ad information. (Shapiro, 2001) Taking these facts into consideration, a survey seemed the best way to re-surface those memories of the participants.

The survey participants are a random group of males and females who were in or around grades 3-8 during the years 1987-1991. This age group was chosen because the goal of the advertising campaign was to prevent kids and teens from doing drugs for the first time. While drug users were also a target, the main purpose was to target kids before they became users.

Elementary school and middle school aged students were in that target group. While ensuring anonymity, the survey provides a random sample of responses and does not take into consideration demographics.

## **Survey**

The pre-tested questionnaire included 16 statements and questions asking the participants about their demographic information and more importantly, their recollection of the anti-drug advertisements. *(See appendix A for survey questions and appendix B for survey tabulation)* Each survey question was specifically designed with wording enabling the recollection of advertisements from the participant's childhood. The purpose of the study was to learn not only whether the advertisements were remembered by the audience, but if the advertisements influenced their decisions to do drugs years after the ads were off the air. While the survey will ensure anonymity, it also enables the participants to provide a perception of their self at the time, relying strictly on their memory. The intention was to evoke a positive or a negative recollection to the advertising.

Since there are many studies about the advertisement's influence directly after the campaigns, but none 15 years later, the results of this survey are critical to the conclusion of this thesis.

## Chapter IV

### Description of Survey

An online survey was administered to determine the influence of anti-drug advertising within the campaign's target audience. Survey respondents were sent an electronic questionnaire to ensure ease and anonymity via an on-line survey website called Zoomerang. This survey was not presented as an evaluation of the advertising campaigns, but rather a generalization of the campaign's influence years later. Respondents were allotted 10 days to fill out the survey electronically and in total 52 people responded. *(See appendix A for survey questions and appendix B for survey tabulation)*

At the beginning of the questionnaire, participants were asked demographic questions to gain an overall knowledge of the respondents. The inquiries were as follows:

- Gender
- Age
- Residence between the years 1987-1990 (Country, Suburb, City)
- Residence while in high school (Country, Suburb, City)
- Family income
- Educational level

This information was important in order to understand some of the reasoning behind the answers. The respondents were males and females in their 20s to early 30s including professionals, college students and graduate students. Most of the respondents grew up in the suburbs. Out of the remaining respondents, there were an equal mix of those who grew up and went to high school in the city and the country. This statistic is important in order to understand the respondent's environments when they were exposed to the advertising and when they could have potentially been approached with drugs for the first time. While the average family income

equally ranged from 30,000 – 100,000 +, all who responded had at least a college degree or are currently working towards one.

Following the demographic questions, participants were asked to evaluate eight statements regarding anti-drug advertising and their opinions on the subject. The participants assessed the statements by using the following scale:

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Additionally, the survey included a “select all that apply” question and an open-ended question.

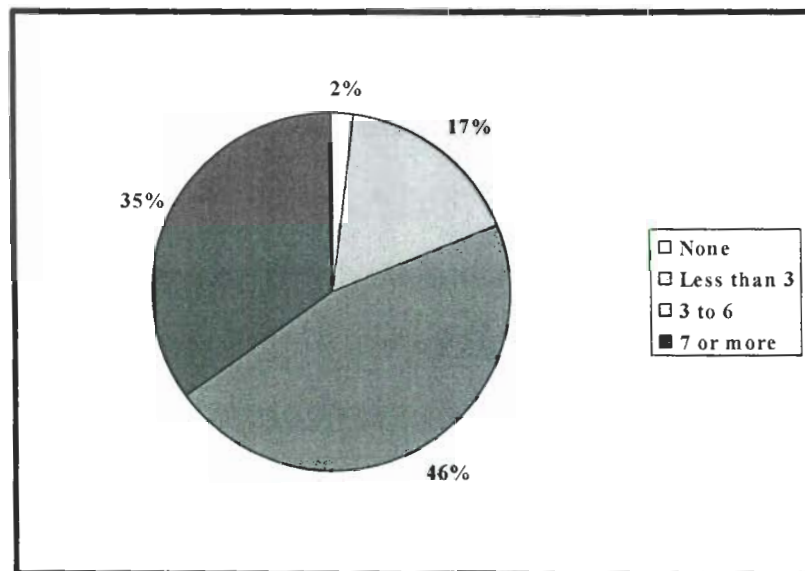


## Survey Results

Each of the 52 respondents answered all 15 closed-ended questions and 36 answered the optional open ended question. The results were tabulated on the basis of the scale: strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree.

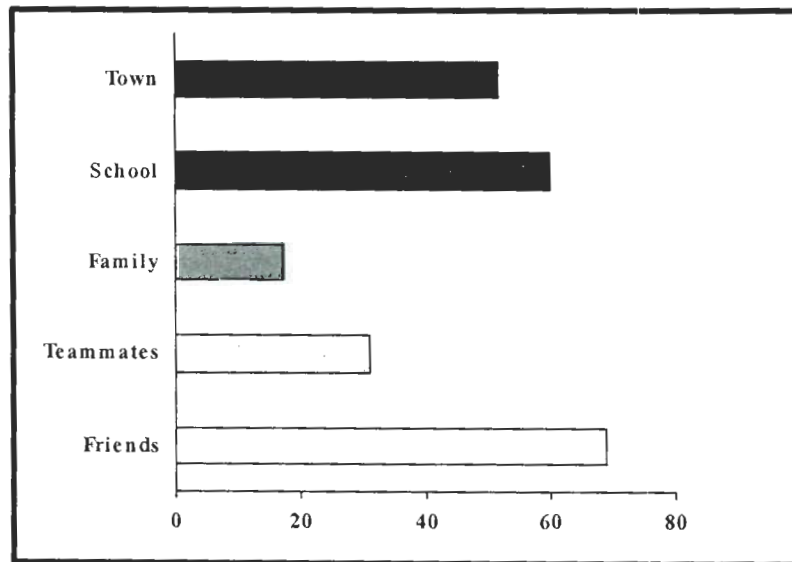
*Statement 1: How would you characterize your television viewing habits between the years 1987-1991?*

Out of 52 respondents, only 2 percent said they did not watch television, 17 percent said they watched less than three hours per week, 46 percent said they watched 3-6 hours per week, and 35 percent said they watched more than 7 hours per week. The majority of the respondents watched at least 3-6 hours or more of television per week implying that they all had adequate exposure to the anti-drug advertising campaign.



*Statement 2: Do you recall drug use among (friends, teammates, family, school/peers, town/community) during your teenage years?*

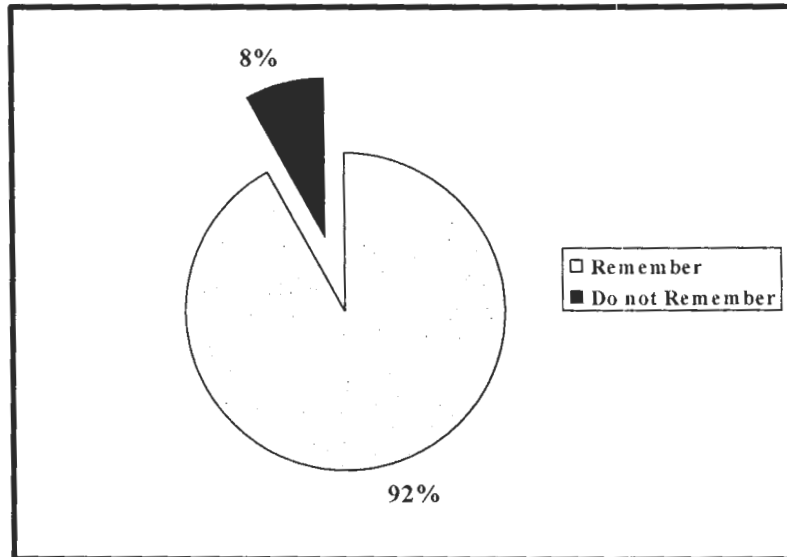
Respondents were asked to select all that apply for this answer. A large percentage of 69 percent recalled drug use among friends, 31 percent among teammates, 17 percent among family, 60 percent among school, and 52 percent among town. All percentages except for teammates and family were over 50 percent which implies that drug use was prevalent in the past environments of most respondents.



*Statement 3: Do you remember anti-drug commercials?*

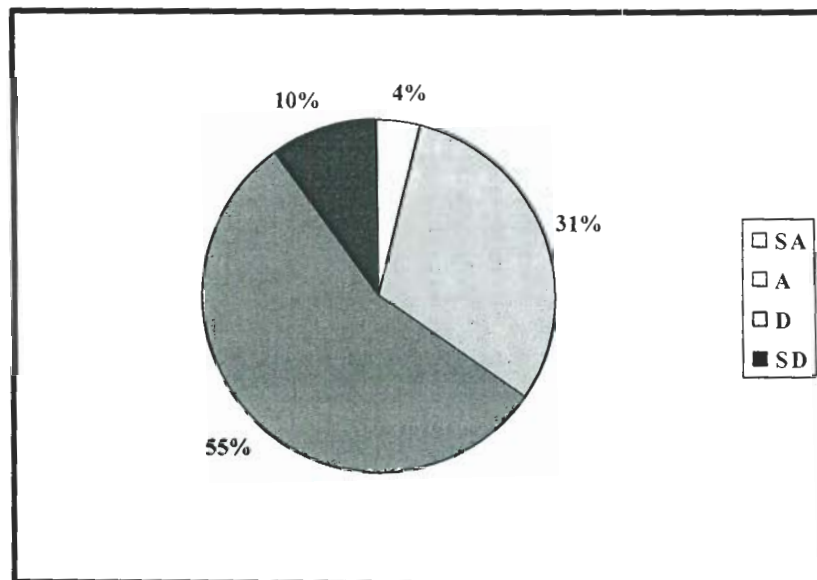
Out of the 52 respondents, 92 percent remembered the ads and only 8 percent did not.

This question was important to understand the audience and their recollections of the advertising.



*Statement 4: The anti-drug television ads I saw as a child influenced my decision either way to do or not to do drugs later in life.*

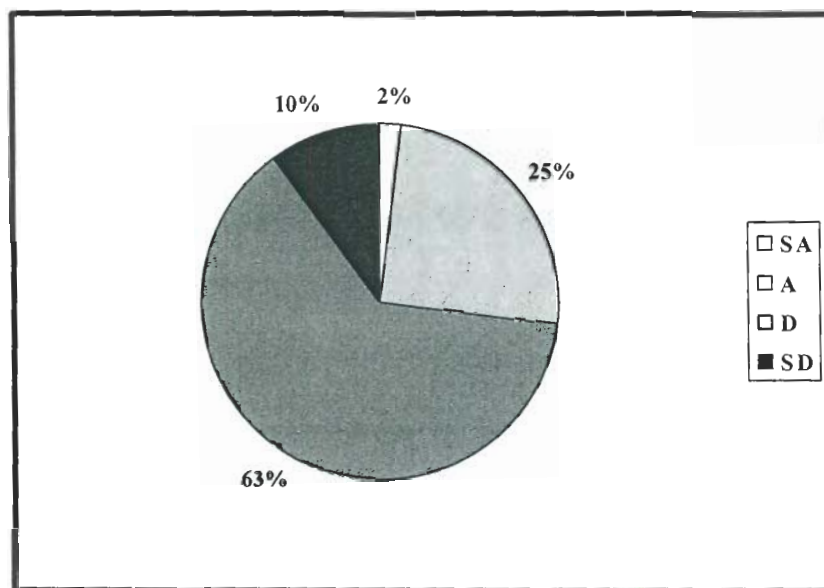
Only 4 percent strongly agreed that the ads influenced their decisions, 31 percent agreed, 56 percent disagreed, and 10 percent strongly disagreed. The purpose of this question was to learn the overall influence of the ads, both positive and negative. These percentages reflect that the majority of the respondents were not influenced by the advertisements.



*Statement 5: The anti-drug commercials I saw as a child deterred me from doing drugs later in life.*

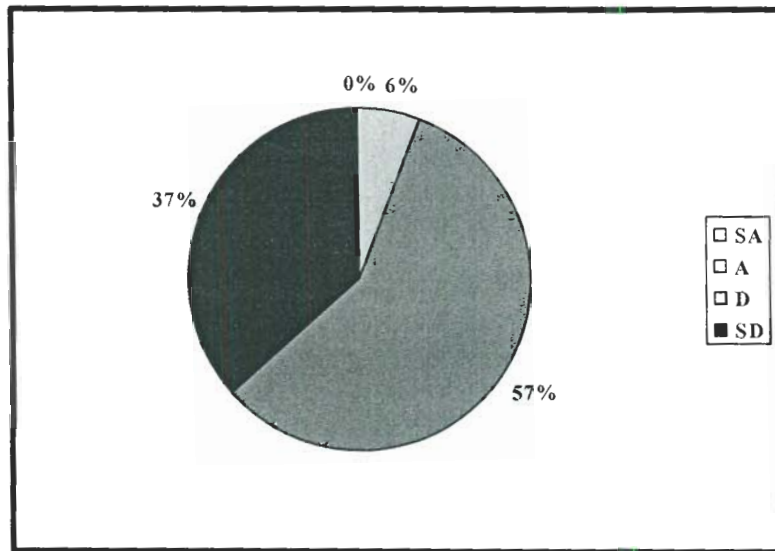
Out of the 52 respondents, only 2 percent strongly agreed that the ads deterred them from using drugs, 25 percent agreed, 63 percent disagreed, and 10 percent strongly agreed.

Specifically, the goal of this question was to determine if the advertising had the intended effect on its audiences. Based on the low 2 percent and low 25 percent responses, it can be assumed that the ads were not overly effective to the group responding to the survey but did have an influence on some people.



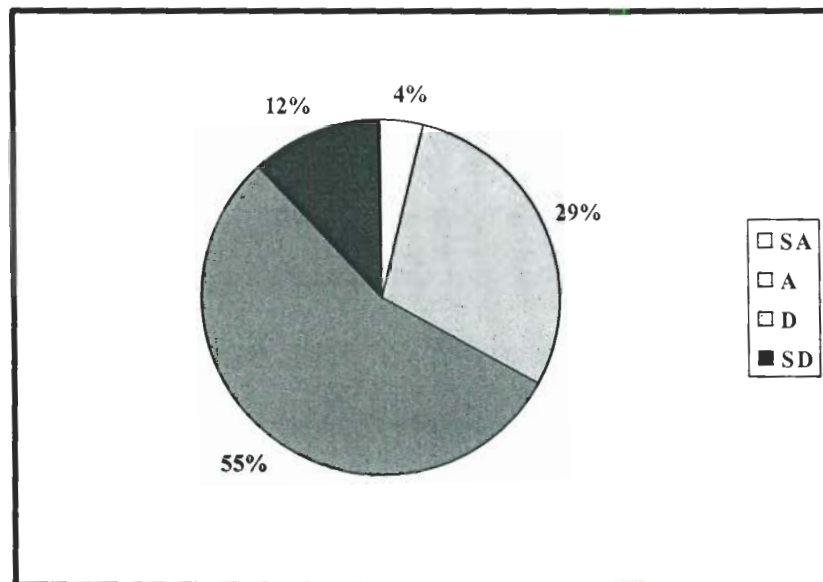
*Statement 6: The anti-drug commercials I saw as a child made me curious about drugs and lead me to do drugs later in life.*

It is important to understand whether the advertising had a reverse effect on its audiences. While no one strongly agreed, 6 percent agreed, 58 percent disagreed, and 37 percent strongly disagreed. This implies that most of the respondents did not begin using drugs as a result of watching the ads.



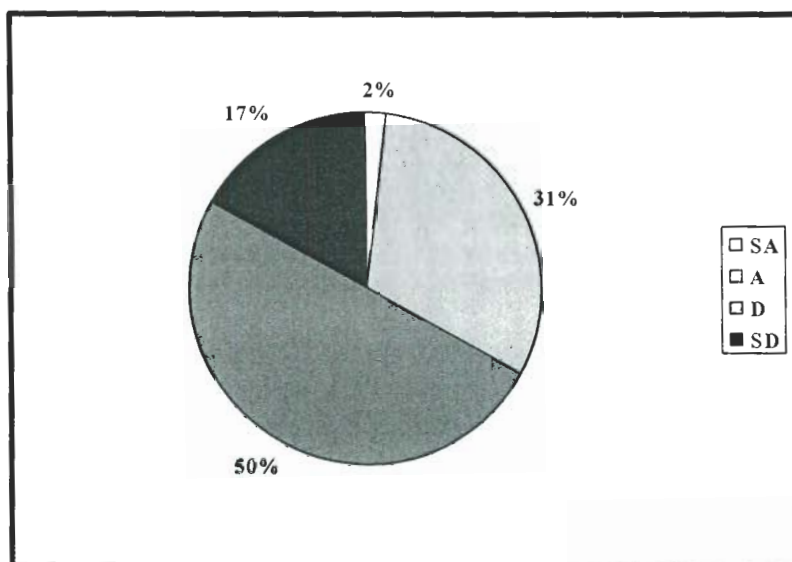
*Statement 7: The anti-drug commercials I saw as a child had a lasting effect on me.*

Only 4 percent strongly agreed that the commercials had a lasting effect, 29 percent agreed, 55 percent disagreed, and 12 percent strongly disagreed. The percentages for this question imply that for the majority of the respondents, the advertising did not have a lasting effect on them.



*Statement 8: Advertising is the best way to communicate to children about not doing drugs.*

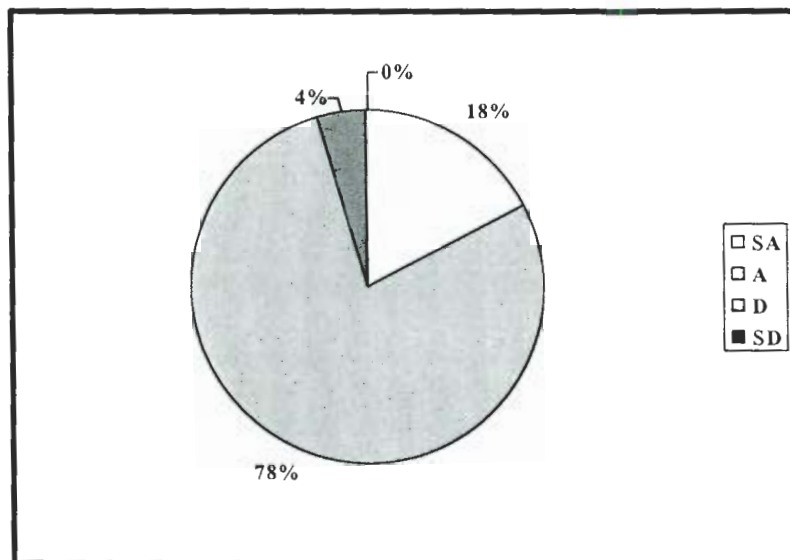
Out of the 52 respondents, only 2 percent strongly agreed, 31 percent agreed, 50 percent disagreed and 17 percent strongly disagreed. It can be assumed that based on the responses to this question, advertising is not the most effective way to reach children about not using drugs.





*Statement 9: As a child, I understood the message of the anti-drug commercials.*

Out of the 52 respondents, 16 percent strongly agreed that they understood the commercials message, 71 percent agreed, 14 percent disagreed, and no one strongly disagreed. The high agreed percentage and added to the strongly agreed percentage implies that the messaging of the ads was understood by the majority of the survey participants.



*Statement 10: Were there other programs/educational efforts (such as DARE) that influenced your opinions about drugs? Please explain.*

Out of the 52 participants, 36 people or 71 percent answered this question. Most agreed that the DARE program, peers, and parents had the greatest influence on their decisions to do or not to do drugs.

### **Survey Conclusion**

Overall, the survey results were consistent with previous studies and research. Since the anti-drug advertising campaign was targeted towards the age group that participated in the study, the first question I wanted to find the results to was whether or not the respondents remembered the anti-drug commercials. This is important because recollection of the advertisements helps to determine the validity of the rest of the responses. In total, 92 percent remembered the commercials mentioned. Perhaps even more importantly was that 71 percent agreed and 16 percent strongly agreed that they understood the message of the anti-drug commercials. Only 14 percent did not understand the messages.

One way to gauge the amount of exposure the respondents had to the advertising campaign was to ask the amount of television they watched as children. Out of the 52 respondents, 46 percent watched an average of 3-6 hours of television per week, while 35 percent watched 7 hours or more. These percentages are important to umbrella the number of times the respondents could have seen the ads. Since the respondents were mostly moderate to heavy television watchers, it can be assumed that they all were exposed to the advertisements multiple times.

Interesting percentages appeared when asked to recall drug use among friends, teammates, family, peers at school and members of their town. While a high percentage of

respondents recalled friends, school, teammates and people in town having used drugs, a very small percentage had a recollection of family drug use. It can be assumed that based on this question in the survey, that drug use was prevalent in the environments of many young people. Understanding these statistics helps to clarify the additional pressures in the respondent's environments.

The survey also asked multiple questions about the advertising campaign's influence on behavior. As expected, there was a split between those who believed that advertisements had an influence and those who believed it did not. While the percentages skewed more towards not having an influence, almost all participants stated that they understood the messaging presented. When asked whether the commercials served as a deterrent, only 13 percent said it did. However, only 3 percent said the advertising made them curious about drugs and lead them to do drugs. Interestingly, none of the respondents strongly agreed on any on the questions based on influence. It can be concluded that while the ads were remembered, understood, and had some effect, they did not have enough of an impact to garner a "strong," *just say no* response.

Out of the 25 percent of respondents that agreed that the advertising deterred them from doing drugs, the majority were females. A 24 year old female said "My parents and the way I was raised were the strongest influence to deter me from drugs in my youth. School programs did not really do the trick since they always seemed rehearsed. I remember seeing and understanding the commercials I saw as a child." Conversely, out of the 6 percent that said that the commercials made them curious about drugs, the majority were males.

When asked whether or not they thought advertising was the best way to communicate to kids about not doing drugs, 67 percent of the respondents did not think that advertising was the best form of communication. This is consistent with the rest of the participant's responses as they also felt that the ads they saw as children did not have a lasting effect on them. While many of

the participants watched significant amounts of television, and almost all remembered and understood the messages of the anti-drug advertising, when asked if the ads deterred them from using drugs, 73 percent felt that the ads did not.

The last question in the survey asked whether there were any other programs or educational efforts that influenced opinions about drug use. One 28 year old male said “DARE was influential when we had police officers come to schools to speak. Even more so was having a recovered junkie that just got out of jail come as a motivational speaker. Both were great forms to influence people about the dangers of drug use, however in judging the school’s reaction to such, those who were into drugs may have been affected by the speeches but it did not seem to curb their usage.” A 26 year old male said that “situation comedies that dealt with drug use with very special episodes” influenced his decisions.

Based on the open ended question, family, friends and guest speakers at school had more of an influence on not using drugs than advertisements and television. A 26 year old female said “DARE was much more influential in getting the point across. Having someone talk to you face to face caught my attention more.” A 33 year old female said “My only influence was my friends. None of us thought it (drugs) was cool; therefore none of us did it. Once I got to college, I really didn’t care about it and thus didn’t do it. The commercials, which I don’t even remember, had nothing to do with that decision.” A 28 year old female added “Really, any anti-drug assemblies or educational demonstrations had an impact on me and influenced my opinions about drugs.”

These survey results correspond with a study conducted by the ONDCP. The ONDCP tested youths and teens in 12 cities to learn their opinions on the anti-drug commercials. The study concluded that while the irony and symbolism used in ads, like the “brain on drugs” commercial, was understood by middle school aged and high school aged students, it was lost on

the younger viewers. In fact, the younger children tended to take the ads more literally and it was found that some kids would act out the frying pan ad in their play kitchens at school. (Office of National Drug Policy, 2002)

The ONDCP study also found that the participants remembered images from the ads but typically did not offer reactions to them. When probed, some of the youth said they thought the ads were effective. In 7th-9th grade groups, participants were attracted by ad images but were unsure about the effects of the ads. It was this age group that most often said anti-drug information should come from parents, not from ads. Youth in 7th-9th grades frequently reported that they thought the anti-drug ads were intended for significantly younger children. By 10th-12th grade, participants watched and clearly remembered the ads but typically found them laughable. They were articulate about feeling disconnected from the people depicted in the ads. In general, the high school focus groups reported that the ads did not influence them but might be effective with much younger children. (Office of National Drug Policy, 2002)

## Chapter V

### Introduction

Drug abuse has been a problem among America's youth for many years. During the Reagan administration, the issue was made a priority and the fight against drugs began. In recognition of these important issues, the United States government initiated the anti-drug advertising solution. The purpose of the advertising campaigns was to prevent the use of drugs amongst teens. Research funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse was used by the Partnership for a Drug Free America (PDFA) to develop a new series of anti-drug public service announcements.

After the launch of the advertising campaign, a revolutionary movement began and the anti-drug advertisements became a part of pop culture. Even now, 15 years after the advertisements were introduced to the public, the slogans and advertising images are remembered, understood, and garner an opinionated response. There have been multiple studies and extensive research completed to determine whether or not the advertisements changed potential drug abuse behavior. Those studies contradict each other, however. Some studies say that the advertising worked, while others say it did not. There have not been any studies similar to this where interviews of the audiences are conducted 15 years later. My survey concludes that years later, the ads did deter some people from trying drugs but that there were also those who believed the ads did not have any influence. It is my conclusion that because the ads had an influence on some people, that they were effective.

## Similarities and Differences

Research conducted by the PDFFA and other government organizations agreed that the advertising campaign was a worthwhile investment. They also believed there was an increase in kids staying away from drugs because of the advertisements.

The survey I administered in 2005 to the advertisement's target audience both affirms and contradicts the government's findings. Many of the participants watched significant amounts of television, and almost all remembered and understood the messages of the anti-drug advertising. When asked if the ads deterred them from using drugs, however, 73 percent felt that the ads did not. These survey findings imply that the advertisements made an impression on its intended target audience. However, the majority of the survey participants believed that the advertisements did not have any influence when they were confronted with drugs for the first time. That said, 25 percent agreed that the advertisements did deter them from using drugs, so for that percentage of people the advertisements were a success.

## Answers

Throughout this thesis, there were specific questions that needed to be answered. Within the research conducted, the answers to those questions were found.

*When the anti-drug campaigns were introduced, did children really understand what they were watching? Did they care?*

Yes, according to the 2005 on-line survey, the target audience understood the ads and its messages.

*Were the national anti-drug campaigns associated with a change in adolescents' drug use behavior?*

After the launch of the advertisements, research reflects a decrease in drug use amongst teens. A survey conducted 15 years later shows that while recollection of the ads is high and the messages did influence decisions for some people, it did not make the large impact that was once believed.

*Specifically, was there a relationship between adolescents' recall of exposure to anti-drug advertising on their probability of trying drugs?*

Based on the survey results, the brain on drugs commercial is the most well known and most influential out of the advertisements. Many vividly remember the image of the frying egg and some say that it influenced their decision.

*Should the government use other forms of media to reach kids?*

The survey concluded that while advertising on television does reach the intended audiences, there are better ways to teach kids about the dangers of drug use. The most influential ways are through a parent's intervention, peers, and face to face communication programs such as DARE, and other in-school assemblies. That said, anti-drug advertising should continue. "Advertising helps consumers interpret experiences. It suggests what should be noticed. It provides cues and clues to help consumers understand and appreciate their feelings." (Braun-LaTour, 2004, p. 1)

*Was the government spending on this campaign worth it?*

Yes, the ads became a national icon, part of pop culture and influenced generations. Most importantly, it started an anti-drug movement that was needed in the United States. The ads helped endorse the Reagan's messages and reach children in a new and effective way.

*Did the campaign impact the designated age group?*

Yes, it is a memory of childhood. The recollection of the advertisements was high for all of the survey respondents.



*What are the reasons why kids try drugs?*

Kids try drugs for many reasons including peer pressure, because they think it's cool, and as an act of rebellion. While advertising may hinder those actions, there are some kids who will try drugs no matter what; even if they are bombarded with the anti-drug advertising messages.

**Future Research Recommendations**

A survey conducted by the initial target audiences of the ads suggests that while advertising reaches a lot of people, it may not be the best medium to influence kid's behavior. It was found that face to face conversations have more of an effect on a youth's actions. Peers, in school assemblies and the DARE program were all efforts that were said to have been influential in the audience's decisions to use or not to use drugs. It would be my recommendation to explore these claims further and to understand if those actions prevented drug abuse.

As culture changes, so do the anti-drug advertisements and messages. Just recently, the ONDCP launched a new advertising campaign with the tagline "Above the influence."

"Teens are a moving target," said Tom Riley, director of public affairs for the ONDCP. "Today's teens are more media savvy than any previous generation... and they're very used to being marketed to. It's very important to talk to teens in a voice that feels authentic."

(Herskovits, 2005)

This new campaign will be talking to teens in aspirational terms. Teens are very concerned about their place in the world and the ONDCP believes that these advertisement's new messages will resonate. The goal of these ads is to be more of a grass roots campaign making it teen-to-teen messaging. (Herskovits, 2005) The ads speak with a more direct voice about drugs using words such as "weed" and "pot" instead of "marijuana." One ad features a teen with his fist in his mouth and a woman translating his mumbling speech: "Yesterday, my friends told me

to smoke some pot and I did, and today they told me to fit my fist in my mouth. I did. I am an idiot.” The spot ends with the slogan, “Live above the influence, above them, above weed.” (Teinowitz, 2005, p. 33)

This new branding effort had the highest test scores of any ONDCP campaign to date. (Herskovits, 2005) My recommendation for future studies is to examine this new generation of media savvy teens and how they are being marketed to, and follow the message’s successes and failures. America’s children are different than they were 15 years ago and are marketed to more today than ever before. It would be beneficial to learn whether or not advertising is more effective on this new generation than it was 15 years ago.

## **Conclusion**

Based on the research and the survey conducted, I believe that the anti-drug advertisements had an impact and were successful. When asked about brand recollection, the target audiences remembered the ads from when they were children and understood the messages presented to them. I believe that even if the ads influenced some people, the advertisements did what it needed to do. Because there are many outside influencers and pressures for kids to try drugs, one more medium reinforcing that drugs are wrong is beneficial.

The ads became national icons and message recall is high. I believe that those facts alone make the ads successful. There are not many advertisements in American culture where an image and slogan are as widespread and as remembered. The “this is your brain on drugs” ad is embedded in the minds of two generations.

Proven in research, repetition is essential in building a brand and sustaining future recollection. The online survey implied that many kids, during the time period the ads were

introduced, watched a lot of television. They saw the ads multiple times and in turn, recognition of the ads is high.

Presidential backing also helped to reinforce the issue and make it a prominent charge in the country. It caused people to take notice and for outside organizations to fund the initiative.

Research shows the ads influenced decisions right after the campaign was introduced. The audience later in life said the ads were remembered and the messages were always clear. When people were asked to think back about what their influencers were however, many respondents did not include the advertisements in their responses.

The intent for all advertising is to trigger a response or to generate a call-to-action. Advertisers have been urged to find the appropriate “cue” so that consumer memory can be unlocked and used in decision making. As done with the successful use of imagery in the frying egg commercial, once a message or image is placed in our long-term memory, it seems virtually never to be forgotten. (Braun-LaTour, 2004, p. 3)

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**Appendix A.**

This survey is being conducted for a thesis project in order to receive a Master of Arts in Corporate and Public Communications from Seton Hall University. The research topic is to examine the impact national, anti-drug campaigns, conducted between the years 1987-1991, had on the decisions of America's young adults. All responses will be kept strictly confidential. If you would like to know the outcome of this study, please contact me at [JESurdyka@aol.com](mailto:JESurdyka@aol.com).

I thank you in advance for your time and cooperation.

- Jill Surdyka

**Survey Questions****About you:**

1. Male or Female
2. Age \_\_\_\_
3. Where were you living between the years 1987-1991?
  - a. City
  - b. Suburb
  - c. Country
4. Where were you living when you were in high school?
  - a. City
  - b. Suburb
  - c. Country
5. What was your estimated family income between the years 1987-1991?
  - a. Below 30,000

- b. 31,000 – 50,000
- c. 51,000 – 75,000
- d. 76,000 – 100,000
- f. 100,000 or above

6. What is your current educational level?

- a. High school
- b. College
- c. Masters or doctorate degree
- f. Other \_\_\_\_\_

**Your opinion:**

7. How would you characterize your television viewing habits between the years 1987-1991?

- a. I did not watch television
- b. Less than 3 hours per week
- c. 3 - 6 hours per week
- d. More than 7 hours per week

8. Do you recall drug use among \_\_\_\_\_ during your teenage years?

*Please select all that apply*

- a. Friends \_\_\_\_\_
- b. Teammates \_\_\_\_\_
- c. Family \_\_\_\_\_
- d. School \_\_\_\_\_
- e. Town \_\_\_\_\_

9. Do you remember anti-drug commercials?

- a. Yes
- b. No

10. The anti-drug television ads I saw as a child influenced my decision either way to do or not to do drugs later in life?

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Disagree
- d. Strongly disagree

11. The anti-drug commercials I saw as a child in fact deterred me from doing drugs later in life.

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Disagree
- d. Strongly disagree

12. The anti-drug commercials I saw as a child made me curious about drugs and led me to do drugs later in life.

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Disagree
- d. Strongly disagree

13. The anti-drug commercials I saw as a child had a lasting effect on me.

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Disagree
- d. Strongly disagree

14. Advertising is the best way to communicate to children about not using drugs.

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Disagree
- d. Strongly disagree



15. As a child, I understood the message of the anti-drug commercials?

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Disagree
- d. Strongly disagree

16. Were there other programs/educational efforts (such as DARE) that influenced your opinions about drugs? Please explain.

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## Appendix B.

## Survey Tabulation

Total number of participants: 52

Q #	About you	Male	Female			
1	Responses	13	39			
	Percent	25%	75%			
Q #	About you	Age				
2	Responses	52				
	Percent	100%				
Q #	About you	City	Suburb	Country		
3	Responses	7	37	8		
	Percent	13%	71%	15%		
4	Responses	6	38	8		
	Percent	12%	73%	15%		
Q #	About you	Below 30	31-50	51-75	76-100	Above 100
5	Responses	5	10	13	13	11
	Percent	10%	19%	25%	25%	21%
Q #	About you	High school	College	Masters	Other	
6	Responses	1	34	17	0	
	Percent	2%	65%	33%	0%	
Q #	Your opinion	None	Less than 3	3-6	7 or more	
7	Responses	1	9	24	18	
	Percent	2%	17%	46%	35%	
Q #	Your opinion	Friends	Teammates	Family	School	Town
8	Responses	33	15	8	29	25
	Percent	69%	31%	17%	60%	52%
Q #	Your opinion	Yes	No			
9	Responses	48	4			
	Percent	92%	8%			
Q #	Your opinion	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	
10	Responses	2	16	29	5	
	Percent	4%	31%	56%	10%	
11	Responses	1	13	33	5	
	Percent	2%	25%	63%	10%	
12	Responses	0	3	30	19	
	Percent	0%	6%	58%	37%	
13	Responses	2	15	28	6	
	Percent	4%	29%	55%	12%	
14	Responses	1	16	26	9	
	Percent	2%	31%	50%	17%	
15	Responses	8	36	7	0	
	Percent	16%	71%	4%	0%	
Q #	Your opinion					
16	Responses	36				
	Percent	71%				

## **Appendix C.**

### **Timeline**

**1980 - 1989-** Ronald Reagan and Nancy Reagan serve as first couple

**1983-** NIDA introduces the “Just Say No” campaign

**1986-** PDFA introduces the “brain on drugs” campaign