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AIDS IN THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN COMMUNITY:  
CELEBRITIES AS AN EFFECTIVE  
COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

by  
Wendy A. Robinson

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the  
Master of Arts Degree  
of  
The Graduate School  
at  
Rowan University  
June 17, 2003

Approved by \_\_\_\_\_  
Professor

Date Approved 6-17-03

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## ABSTRACT

Wendy A. Robinson  
AIDS IN THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN COMMUNITY:  
CELEBRITIES AS AN EFFECTIVE  
COMMUNICATION STRATEGY  
2003

Dr. Don Bagin, Advisor  
Master of Arts in Public Relations

The purpose of the study was to determine whether using celebrities to deliver HIV/AIDS prevention awareness messages to the African-American community is an effective public relations strategy.

Celebrities are used to persuade people to buy shoes, cars, toothpaste, etc., but can they persuade people to change risky behavior: protecting themselves and others from the spread of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases?

Research conducted for this thesis found celebrities to be effective tools when their actions coincide or mirror the message. Celebrities that are perceived to be irresponsible or whose lyrics and/or actions do not coincide with safe-sex aren't taken seriously, thereby rendering their message ineffective.

Messages delivered by non-celebrities can be just as powerful as those delivered by celebrities if done appropriately, according to study findings.

Research for this thesis came from the following: The Center of Disease Control, face-to-face interviews, Internet searches, and focus panels. The focus panels were

conducted to compare listeners' reactions to non-celebrity personal service announcements and celebrity personal service announcements.

## MINI-ABSTRACT

Wendy A. Robinson  
AIDS IN THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN COMMUNITY:  
CELEBRITIES AS AN EFFECTIVE  
COMMUNICATION STRATEGY  
2003

Dr. Don Bagin, Advisor  
Master of Arts in Public Relations

This project researched the effectiveness of celebrities in delivering HIV/AIDS prevention awareness messages.

Evidence presented in this thesis helped determine whether celebrities are viable tools in the fight against HIV/AIDS. Celebrities that are perceived responsible were found to be better spokespersons to deliver the message (compared to "irresponsible" celebrities).

## Acknowledgments

I wish to express my sincere appreciation to:

Dr. Don Bagin and Dr. Diane Penrod for their assistance in the development of this thesis.

To my parents for their indirect encouragement.

Mr. James Henry Sr. and James Henry Jr. for their love and support.

Kimberly Eaton, Okera Adofo, Douglas Bynum and Hannah Pickett for their words of encouragement and prayers.

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## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

Over a decade ago HIV/AIDS was thought to be a disease that afflicted only gay males and intravenous drug-users. Over a decade later, statistics reveal new information. Refusing to discriminate, HIV/AIDS strikes people from all walks of life.

HIV/AIDS has taken a toll on the African-American community. According to the Center for Disease Control in Atlanta, GA., although African Americans made up approximately 12 percent of the U.S. population, they accounted for half of new reported HIV cases in the United States in 2001.<sup>1</sup> Today, AIDS is the second leading cause of death among African-American women between the ages of 25 and 34 and African-American men 35 - 44. The rate of AIDS among African-American women is 61.9 cases per 100,000 persons, 16 times the rate for white women of 3.8 cases per 100,000.<sup>2</sup> AIDS is among the top three causes of death for African-American men age 25-54 and women ages 35-44.<sup>3</sup> Thirty-two percent of African-American men who have sex with men were found to be infected with HIV in a six-city study of men ages 23-29 years, compared to 14 percent of Latinos and seven percent of whites in the study.<sup>4</sup>

To stop the further spread of this disease, awareness of the risk of infection, education about consistent use of condoms, and encouraging abstinence is a necessity.

---

<sup>1</sup> Center of Disease Control. "HIV/AIDS Among African Americans." Key Facts (2001). CDC Fact Sheet  
<[http:// www.cdc.gov/hiv/pubs/Facts/afam.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/pubs/Facts/afam.pdf)>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pg. 1

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pg. 1

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., pg. 2

Until an effective vaccine becomes available, the surest means available to ensure protection is abstinence or constant vigilance regarding condom use.

For the past decade celebrities have not only entertained us, but they have been used to inform the masses on various health issues. Celebrities have also established foundations to raise money for research in finding cures for diseases as well as financially assist people afflicted with the diseases. HIV/AIDS has attracted many celebrity advocates.

### The Need for the Study

In 2002, HIV/AIDS is no longer an epidemic; it has reached pandemic proportions and many people of African descent across the globe are dying. Since there is no known cure, education is the next best thing to ceasing the spread. Billions of dollars have gone into research and education; however, this is not evident when looking at the increasing rate of infection in the African-American community. Many, due to disenfranchisement, low self-esteem, and ignorance, are unaware of risk factors for the disease. Too many people are claiming: "I didn't know," "I didn't think it would happen to me," or "Only certain people get that disease." Corporations like Levi, Viacom, BET and The Henry J. Kaiser Foundations have created PSAs, educational literature, and sponsored concerts for HIV/AIDS awareness, but are viewers listening? Are the messages being heard and listened to? Most importantly, have celebrities' messages prompted behavior change?

## The Purpose of The Study

The objective of this qualitative study was to determine the effectiveness of celebrities as a communication strategy in delivering HIV/AIDS messages to the African-American community. Do the messages motivate people to practice prevention through the use of condoms or abstinence? Earvin "Magic" Johnson, diagnosed HIV positive in 1991, continues through various means to promote HIV/AIDS awareness. Rappers, R&B artists, and gospel artists, participate in HIV/AIDS awareness benefit concerts. But are the messages just a blurb in the overall scheme of things?

The study determined if watching BET's "Rap-it-Up" or KNOW HIV/AIDS PSAs, or attending such concerts as Levi's "World AIDS Day," leave lasting, behavior-changing impressions on the target audience.

Celebrities have a great deal of influence and that influence, if channeled in the right direction and format, may be the key to educating the African-American community. Newsstands across the nation sell such magazines as, *Vibe*, *XXL*, *The Source*, *Ebony*, *Jet*, and *Essence*, for which the African-American community is the target audience. Movies, television, and music videos attract a large number of viewers. Are the images and messages internalized?

## Problem

This study is designed to answer the following questions:

1. Are celebrities an effective communication strategy in delivering HIV/AIDS messages to the African-American community?
2. What other method(s) could be used to educate the African-American community on HIV/AIDS prevention?

## Procedures

The procedures for the study were to:

1. Contact AIDS Delaware, YouthAIDS, Minority Educational Entertainment Production, Black Entertainment Television and The Henry J. Kaiser Foundation for literature and public service announcements. They were asked if an increase of awareness has occurred since working with celebrities.

2. Conduct three focus groups to determine attitudes and opinions by comparing public service announcements with celebrities and those without celebrities. Are celebrities a viable strategy for delivering AIDS messages?

## Limitations

1. The amount of secondary research found is limited to seven articles; only one is directly related. The one directly related article is 10-years old.
2. The results from the focus panels will reflect only the views and opinions of the participants.

## Definitions of Terms

AIDS	Acquired Immune Syndrome, a viral disease that causes the body's immune system to break down, rendering it unable to fight off infections.
BET	African-American Entertainment Television; sponsors the Rap-It-Up campaign.
Celebrities	Well-known people in the entertainment industry.
CDC	National Center for Disease Control.
Henry J. Kaiser Foundation (Kaiser Foundation)	Provides health information and research.
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus - the virus that causes AIDS.
Messages	Communication sent by one person (group) to another.

MEEP

Motivational Educational  
Entertainment Productions.

PSI (YouthAIDS)

Population Services International

PSA

Public service announcement.

Participant

Focus panel participant.

Viacom

One of the largest media companies  
in the world.

## CHAPTER 2

### Review of Related Literature

In an attempt to locate related literature on the effectiveness of celebrities in delivering HIV/AIDS prevention awareness messages, the researcher used such libraries as Rowan University's Keith and Shirley Campbell Library, University of Delaware Library, Temple University Library and the Philadelphia AIDS Library. Internet and database searches were also utilized. The researcher conducted two face-to-face interviews with the director of education and outreach of AIDS Delaware and a member of Motivational Educational Entertainment Productions (MEEP). Interviews via e-mail were also conducted with BET's Rap-It-Up public affairs and events manager, the special project assistant of Population Services International (YouthAIDS initiative), and The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation (KNOW HIV/AIDS campaign).

Library searches resulted in no information; however, the Internet search resulted in one related study conducted by Motivational Educational Entertainment Productions (MEEP) titled "The MEE Report: Reaching the Hip-Hop Generations." Patrick McLaurin and Ivan Juzang of MEEP conducted the study in 1992. MEEP publishes detailed reports on a variety of serious issues affecting urban audiences. The study examined communication strategies for delivering substance abuse and "prosocial" behavior messages to African-American, inner-city teenagers.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Juzang, Ivan and McLaurin, Patrick. "The MEE Report: Reaching the Hip-Hop Generation." 1993, 4 Dec. 2002 <<http://www.aidsinfobbs.org/periodicals/focus/83>>

McLaurin and Juzang's study found members of the hip-hop generation used extremely specific standards against which to judge the accuracy and authenticity of education messages.<sup>6</sup>

The study suggested that messages are heard, but they aren't listened to because study respondents said over and over again, that 'No one is really talking to me.'<sup>7</sup>

During a face-to face interview with the director of education and outreach at AIDS Delaware in Wilmington, DE, the researcher posed the question, "Do you think celebrities are effective communicators in delivering anti-HIV/AIDS messages?" The director responded, "I think they are effective for certain generations, but on the other hand, statistics say otherwise; the rate of infection continues to increase. Based on that I would say no."<sup>8</sup> The director said that he was 40 years old and can relate to Magic Johnson and how his disclosure impacted him, but at-risk youth do not relate to him. "They only see the activist, businessman Magic Johnson, so they don't have a connection to him or his message."<sup>9</sup>

Organizations such as Black Entertainment Tonight (BET) and The Henry J. Kaiser Foundation, in conjunction with Viacom, have launched national media campaigns that target at-risk audiences. According to BET's public affairs and events manager, although BET has taken the lead in their entertainment industry as it relates to addressing the issue, they are not aware of any studies on the effectiveness of celebrities communicating HIV/AIDS prevention awareness and education messages.

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<sup>6</sup> Juzang, Ivan and McLaurin, Patrick. "The MEE Report: Reaching the Hip-Hop Generation." 1993, 4 Dec. 2002 <<http://www.aidsinfobbs.org/periodicals/focus/83>>

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., pg. 2

<sup>8</sup> Hawkins, Frank. Face-to-face interview. 10 January 2003

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., pg. 2



The Kaiser Foundation, in conjunction with Viacom, launched the "KNOW HIV/AIDS" campaign, which also utilizes celebrities such as comedian/actress Mo'Nique, R&B recording artist, Ashanti and non-celebrities in their personal service announcements. They too have no research on celebrities' effectiveness in disseminating prevention awareness messages. Population Services International also launched an initiative called YouthAIDS that showcases global HIV/AIDS prevention programs that use music and the media. However, they do not have research that suggests using music/celebrities is an effective communication strategy. The researcher failed to find additional studies that were directly related to the thesis topic at the libraries and online searches. Articles that were found at the Philadelphia AIDS Library only discussed celebrities that participated in concerts like World AIDS Day 2002 held in South Africa and other benefits; they failed to provide information regarding the effectiveness of such celebrities and/or concerts.

Letters from Black Entertainment Television, AIDS Delaware, The Henry J. Kaiser Foundation, and Population Services International have been received, stating that they do not know of any studies directly related to this thesis: AIDS in the African-American Community: Celebrities as an Effective Communication Strategy. (See Appendix A)

## CHAPTER 3

### Research Design

The research design for this project requires statistical information on the rate of HIV/AIDS in the African-American community and the opinions on the effectiveness of messages delivered by celebrities. The researcher used five sources for this thesis: 1.) Rowan University Campbell Library; 2.) On-line databases; 3.) Internet search engines; 4.) Interviews with HIV/AIDS activists; and 5.) Focus panel interviews.

### Related Research

The databases used to locate related literature were Lexis/Nexus, ERIC, and the Center of Disease National AIDS Clearinghouse, and the Virtual Academic Library of New Jersey (VALE). The keywords/phrases used for the search were "AIDS messages," "AIDS and African-American community," and "celebrities and AIDS." This search produced statistical information on AIDS in the African-American community, but nothing on celebrity and AIDS messages.

The Internet search engines such as, "google.com," "askjeeves.com," "yahoo.com," and "msn.com," using the same keywords/phrases, produced seven relative articles-one directly related to the thesis.

Phone calls were made, in addition to letters and emails mailed to various HIV/AIDS agencies requesting information on the state of HIV/AIDS in the African-American community. The agencies were also asked if they knew of any related research and, if not, to provide a letter stating that. The agencies that were contacted were, AIDS

Delaware, YouthAIDS, The Balm in Gilead, The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundations, and Motivational Educational Entertainment Production.

### Primary Research

Primary research was generated via three focus panels. Each panel was asked to compare personal service announcements with celebrities and personal service announcement without celebrities (non-celebrity PSAs). The Henry J. Kaiser Foundation and BET Rap-It-Up supplied the researcher with VHS PSAs that were shown to each focus panel.

## CHAPTER 4

### Research Findings

Three focus panels were conducted among college students (age range 17 - 25) at Delaware State University in Dover, DE and Rowan University in Glassboro, NJ.

Participants were given a consent form to fill out that explained what they would be doing and that their responses comparing public service announcements with celebrities and public service announcements without celebrities would be the basis for research for this thesis statement.

Each focus panel was asked a series of structured questions, along with other questions that were based on participant statements and non-verbal communications. Each panel was encouraged to elaborate on the structured questions if they so desired and to discuss whatever they saw fit regarding the PSAs.

Each panel began with three warm-up questions: What are the main things you know about HIV/AIDS? What else do you feel you need to know? And do you know anyone with HIV/AIDS?

#### Current Knowledge regarding HIV/AIDS

The focus panel began with participants answering the following question:

*What are the main things you know about HIV/AIDS?*

Participants (24 total) knew how HIV/AIDS is transmitted:

- Unprotected Sex.
- Blood Transfusions
- Intravenous drug use.

- Infected mother to unborn child.
- Bodily fluids.

One participant wrote in his/her response, “you get it [HIV/AIDS] through unprotected sex with several partners.”

While that is true, it's not totally accurate. It doesn't matter how many partners one has; the disease can be contracted via one partner through unprotected sex and that needs to be emphasized.

*What else do you need to feel you need to know?*

- How far are scientists from a cure? (An overwhelming majority of participants were very concerned about a cure)
- HIV/AIDS origination?
- Was it [HIV/AIDS] created as a genocidal plan to eliminate homosexuals and certain minority groups?
- How do I get the cure?
- Everything there is to know: everything?
- How does it [HIV/AIDS] work, or how does the disease progress?
- When is there going to be a cure for the average person?
- How does the virus attack first-internally and externally?
- What is the life-span of an infected person and what things have to be done to remain healthy?
- How can I help with the prevention of AIDS?
- Is there a cure now that only certain people have access to?

One participant's comment, "I think there's a cure, but there's more money in treating the disease than curing the disease, so only certain people can be cured." Asked who would be these "certain people," "wealthy white people, like the President, Donald Trump, people like that."

The researcher then asked whether they thought Magic Johnson was cured- although not white, he's wealthy. The majority said, "I don't think he's cured, but he has enough money to buy the necessary medications to make it [the virus] undetectable."

Participants were asked whether they knew anyone with HIV/AIDS; 14 out of 24 said they didn't know anyone infected with the disease.

#### NON-CELEBRITY PERSONAL SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENTS

The focus panels continued with three sets of personal service announcements. Each set presented three PSAs. After each set, participants were asked to answer structured questions along with a discussion.

The first set of non-celebrity PSAs produced by KNOW/HIV:

#### "Locker Room"

Scene/Script: A locker room in a boys high school gym class. Several boys are in "tighty whities" getting changed. A big burly gym coach with a beer gut rolls by and sees one of the boys looking at his crotch.  
The coach says: "Hey Mackall, whatcha lookin' at? You got somethin' goin' on down there? Come here, let me take a look. I know syphilis when I see it."  
  
We see the other boys take notice and stare at the kid who is frozen in fear.  
  
Announcer: Get the uncomfortable answers comfortably.

*What did you like about the PSA?*

The majority said the following:

- The use of humor.
- Caught the eye.
- Non-dictating.

*What did you not like about this PSA?*

- Too fast.
- What's the number to call if you have a question?
- Focused on young people; should target a diverse age group.
- Young people are sexually active more than older people; it should target ages 12 and up.
- PSA didn't say how you get AIDS or STDs.
- Looking at home for the problem.

*What new information did you learn from this PSA?*

- MTV sponsors awareness commercials.
- Nothing.
- Contact website at the end of the commercial.

During the discussion the majority of the participants said they already knew about sexually transmitted diseases. What they want to know is how to prevent such diseases, whom can they talk to, and what telephone number(s) they can call.

*How persuasive did you think this PSA was to get people to protect themselves?*

Participants did not find this PSA to be persuasive. They said it was humorous, but they didn't think it would persuade people to protect themselves.

"Communication"  
(See following page for script)

*What did you like about this PSA?*

This PSAs turned off male participants; they found it to be geared toward homosexuals. However, no mention of sexual preference was ever mentioned in the PSA. It shows a group of men sitting around talking about how to better communicate with your partner about protection-using a condom, with music from R&B recording artist Mary J. Blige playing in the background.

Female participants said they thought it was geared towards homosexuals, but said it was realistic and they all liked the use of music (Mary J. Blige) in the background.

Other likes were as follows:

- Spoke candidly.
- Provided different situations.
- Used humor.
- Background music (Mary J. Blige).
- Realistic.
- Real people who are infected with virus sending the message.
- Didn't appear to be dictating
- Was straight to the point.



## "Communication" :15 seconds



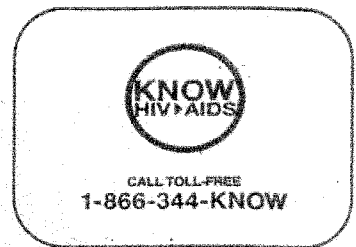
Guy: "Learn how to talk to your partner – that's essential."



"If you can't talk about sex, about using a condom..."



"If you are scared to talk about it, that might be someone you shouldn't be with."



(VO): For more information about HIV/AIDS, including where to go to be tested, call toll-free: 1-866-344-KNOW.

## "Protection" :30 seconds



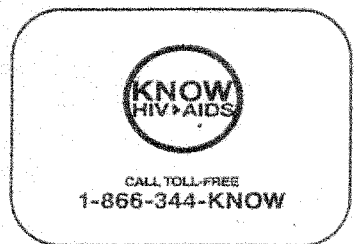
Guy: "I was young, and I remember knowing AIDS was out there, HIV was out there, all types of STDs were out there."



"I didn't have the self-worth. Part of me wanted to get sick because I didn't like myself at the time—for my own reasons. But I didn't."



"One day I realized that I didn't have to protect the person I was, but I needed to protect the person I wanted to be. And that's why I started protecting myself."



(VO): For more information about HIV/AIDS, including where to go to be tested, call toll-free: 1-866-344-KNOW.

- The settings were familiar.
- Geared toward young people.

*What did you not like about this PSA?*

- There were no women.

*What new information did you learn from this PSA?*

- The hotline telephone number to call.

*How persuasive did you think this PSA was to get people to protect themselves?*

Most participants said they felt this PSA was somewhat persuasive. Some said they didn't find it persuasive because it was geared toward homosexuals and they do not fit in that category, "I would tune that commercial out because I'm not gay," a male participant commented.

### "Pharmacy"

*Setting/Script:* African-American grandmother and grandson in a pharmacy. They both are walking down an aisle, when the grandson stops at the condom section.  
 Grandson's voice in head: What the... ultra ribbed, sheer sensation, extra strength, pleasure magnum, climax control.  
 Grandmother: "You know honey, if you have any question about gonorrhea, syphilis, herpes, whatever, you know you could always come and talk to your grandma."

*What did you like about this PSA?*

- It was comical.

*What did you not like about this PSA?*

- It wasn't informative.

- It didn't mention HIV/AIDS.
- The hotline number was recited too fast.
- It made fun of the situation; wasn't serious.

A few participants said during the discussion, "I got the message, but what am I suppose to do with it now?"

*What new information did you learn from this PSA?*

Participants said although it was comical, no new information was learned from this PSA.

*How persuasive did you think this PSA was to get people to protect themselves?*

Participants found nothing persuasive in getting people to protect themselves. They believed that the PSA wasn't serious.

### BET's "Do you know who's clean?"

*Setting/script:* African-American male in a room sweating and thinking about the women it appears he's been with. Various women are in a line-up similar to a suspect line-up.  
 Narrator: So do you know who's clean? Let's start with Kiki, "Ms. I don't do this on the first date." Uh, huh, and what about Andrea?  
 Males voice: "This is your first time right?"  
 Narrator: Wrong! (Laughter)  
 Male: "I don't know."  
 Narrator: You don't know.  
 Male: "I don't know"(he looks at the palm of his hand that has big question mark on it).  
 Female Voice: It's like this, you don't know who's clean or infected with AIDS or other sexually transmitted disease, so rap-it-up. To get the facts about safer sex call toll free 1-866-RAP-IT-UP.

*What did you like about this PSA?*

- It was realistic.
- It had both males and females.

- It showed various types of females i.e. nerd, church-girl, etc.
- Subliminal message of a man hanging.
- Not to base a person's HIV status by how he/she looks

*What did you not like about this PSA?*

- The women were too attractive.

*What new information did you learn from this PSA?*

- That HIV/AIDS has no particular "look."
- 1-866-RAP-IT-UP.

*How persuasive did you think this PSA was to get people to protect themselves?*

Out of all the non-celebrity PSAs this one was the most popular. Participants said they likened it to "This is your brain on drugs" commercial from the 1990's where an egg is frying in a pan. One participant said that commercial was "powerful" back then. Some thought commercials would do better if they showed the effects of AIDS, children that have AIDS, and /or drug users.

"Boy"  
(See following page for script)

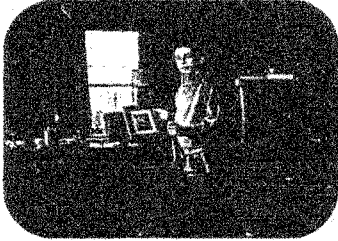
*What did you like about this PSA?*

- It made you think.
- It made you feel sympathetic towards the boy.
- Appealed to the emotions.

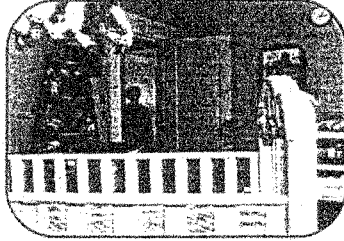
*What did you not like about this PSA?*

- It wasn't realistic: "An entire family died of AIDS?"

**"Boy" :30 seconds**



A ten-year-old boy speaks from various locations in a typical suburban home. Boy: "My dad died when I was six."



"Then my mom had my little brother. He was born with it. They both got sick and died."



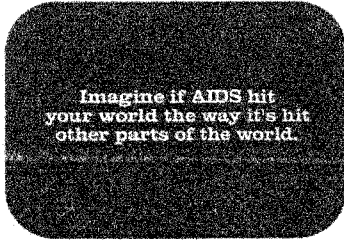
"This is the room my big sister died in."



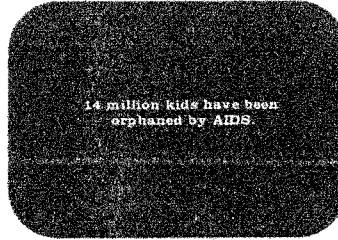
"She got it the worst. She hung on for a long time, and I took care of her."



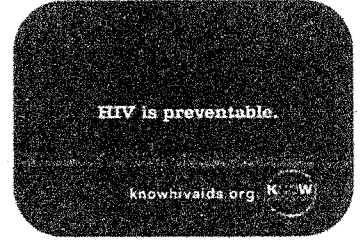
"Nobody came to help.... We didn't know what to do."



Super: Imagine if AIDS hit your world the way it's hit other parts of the world.



Super: 14 million kids have been orphaned by AIDS.



Super: HIV is preventable. [www.knowhivaid.org](http://www.knowhivaid.org)

*What new information did you learn from this PSA?*

- Statistics: 14 million kids have been orphaned by AIDS.
- It can lead to the deaths of an entire family

*How persuasive did you think this PSA was to get people to protect themselves?*

Most participants said because it appealed to the emotions (they felt sorry for the child) it was persuasive. There was a debate during the discussion period in which a couple of participants said it was unrealistic that an entire family who succumb to the disease. Others mentioned stories that they read or saw on television that showed people whose core family members, (mother, father, sister) had died from AIDS-related illnesses.

The participants that said it was unrealistic said nothing further, but looked shocked to hear that it can and does happen.

“SUV Mom”  
(See following page for script)

*What did you like about this PSA?*

- It made you think.
- It made you feel sympathetic towards the boy.
- Appealed to the emotions.

*What did you not like about this PSA?*

- It was too scary.
- It wasn't realistic.

**"SUV Mom" :30 seconds**



A suburban mom drives her SUV through an upscale planned community, where the yards have become overgrown and many houses are for sale.



**Woman:** "That's Stan and Jill Foster's place. They were the first to go. Then Carol Pierce. Dan Walton. The Cohens."



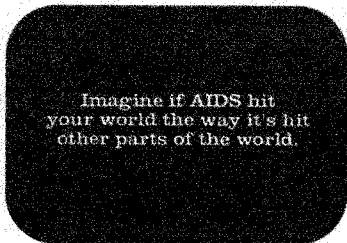
"The Schwab kids lost their Mom, their aunt, their sister, all in a month. That was a tough one."



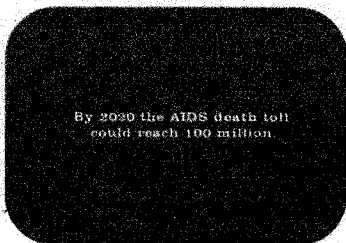
She carries a box of household supplies to a house and delivers it to a child at the front door.



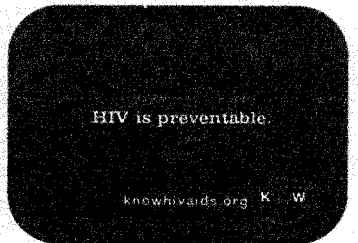
"We've had no support. We're losing. People are dying."



**Super:** Imagine if AIDS hit your world the way it's hit other parts of the world.



**Super:** By 2020 the AIDS death toll could reach 100 million.



**Super:** HIV is preventable. [www.knowhiv.org](http://www.knowhiv.org)

Creative: DDB Bass & Howes

*What new information did you learn from this PSA?*

- Statistics: By 2020 the death toll may reach 100 million.
- It changes lives.

*How persuasive did you think this PSA was to get people to protect themselves?*

Most participants said this PSA also appealed to the emotions; thus they felt it was persuasive. Some participants reflected back to the “Boy” PSA saying that it wasn’t realistic that not only an entire family, but also an entire neighborhood died of AIDS. One participant felt this PSA people wouldn’t get the message because it would “scare” them. There was another debate with some participants saying that HIV/AIDS is a scary topic/disease and maybe that’s a strategy - scare people into protecting themselves.

### CELEBRITY PERSONAL SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENTS

The final series of PSAs showcased appearances by the following celebrities: singer/actress/poet Jill Scott; hip-hop recording artists Little Zane and Ja Rule; and actress/comedian/author Mo’Nique.

#### Personal Service Announcement featuring Ja Rule

<p><i>Setting/Script:</i> Rapper, Ja Rule appears on a rooftop overlooking NYC skyline. Ja Rule: You know how serious AIDS is? Are you aware that the leading cause of death for African-Americans 25-44 is AIDS/HIV? If yall want more information on HIV/AIDS call the number 1-866-RAP-IT-UP.</p>
--

*What did you like about this PSA?/ What did you like about this PSA?*



Only one participant said she liked the PSA featuring Ja Rule. The researcher asked whether she was a Ja Rule fan; she said yes. The other responses were surprising. Although Ja Rule is a platinum-selling hip-hop recording artist, the other 23 participants said they could not take him seriously.

Participants said there was nothing learned, nothing liked, and didn't find it persuasive in getting people to protect themselves.

*What new information did you learn from this PSA?*

All participants said they didn't learn anything from Ja Rule's PSA nor did they find his PSA to be persuasive.

*Do you think Ja Rule is credible in this role?*

Participants did not consider Ja Rule to be credible in this role. One participant wrote, "Because of his music, I don't believe him." Others during discussion said that although they don't know what he does in his personal life, his lyrics don't coincide with a "safe-sex" and/or "get tested" messages. Some male participants said if they saw it [Ja Rule's PSA] on television, they would turn the channel. "I simply can't take him seriously in that role and his singing is annoying," said a male participant. A female participant agreed and said that she tuned him out once she heard him singing. Another participant said, "I don't believe that Ja Rule actually practices what he preaches. Just from hearing his music, I don't know him as a person, but the message that he puts out seems that he's all about sex and he's never preaching safe sex. And as far as the PSA is concerned, he probably got paid to do it. I don't feel his message is valid."

Personal Service Announcement featuring Jill Scott

*Setting/Script:* Jill Scott sitting down.

*Jill Scott:* I, I, I, I, I was chillin' with him on a Sunday

It was a good day all day making love day. I, I, I, I, I didn't think that I, I, I, I, I,  
could feel that safe and that comfortable and that secure, but I, I, I, I, I, did and

H I, I, I, I, I, V came to visit

Be Safe, Be Smart, RAP-IT-UP

Jill Scott used poetry (she's a singer and spoken word artist) to deliver the message.

*What did you like about this PSA?*

- Liked *how* she delivered the message. "It caught your attention and made you think about what she said," participant comment.
- The use of her voice.

*What did you not like about this PSA?*

- Only one participant said she did not like this PSA. She said she didn't like poetry so she wouldn't listen to this PSA.

*What new information did you learn from this PSA?*

- Think about what you're doing.
- Be careful.

*How persuasive did you think this PSA was to get people to protect themselves?*

The majority said it was persuasive because it made you think about the possibility of getting AIDS. One participant said, "I think people who are fans may be influenced by her message."

*"Do you believe she is credible in this role? Do you believe Jill Scott follows the advice she/he gives you? Why or why not?"*

All participants said Jill Scott was a very positive role model because "she carries herself in a respectable manner and she's real positive." They also said that they believe she follows the advice that she gives.

Personal Service Announcement featuring Free of BET's "106 & Park"

*Setting/Script:* Free in a room with only a chair.

*Free:* What's up all? I'm Free from BET's "106 & Park" and to all my brothas out there, this one's for you. Now I know a lot of you are having sex and many are using protection, but from the heart, I want you to stay safe. There are so many sexually transmitted diseases out there and we are losing way, way, too many lives; so rap it up. To get the facts about safer sex, call 1-866-RAP-IT-UP.

*What did you like about this PSA?*

- She was candid and sincere.
- Simple and to the point.

*What did you not like about this PSA?*

Participants said there wasn't anything they didn't like

*What new information did you learn from this PSA?*

Participants felt that no real pertinent information was provided, but they did get the RAP-IT-UP hotline telephone number.

*How persuasive did you think this PSA was to get people to protect themselves?*

During discussion, male participants said that they didn't know how persuasive she was on a long-term basis. They [participants] may think about what she's saying at

that moment, but when they're about to engage in sexual activity, they're not sure if they would think about that message.

*"Do you believe she is credible in this role? Do you believe Free follows the advice she/he gives you? Why or why not?"*

Free was found to be credible in this role because of how she "carries herself." On the show ["106 & Park"] "she's down to earth and positive."

Personal Service Announcement featuring Mo'Nique  
(See following page for script)

Mo'Nique's commercial garnered similar responses. The only difference was the manner in which she delivered her message, also through what she's known for - comedy.

*What did you like about this PSA?*

- She used humor.
- She was honest and sincere. "She said what a mother or best girlfriend would say," said a participant.

*What did you not like about this PSA?*

Participants said there wasn't anything they didn't like

*How persuasive did you think this PSA was to get people to protect themselves?*

Participants said that Mo'Nique's PSA was very persuasive because it was realistic. When they heard her message, they also heard their mothers, aunts, grandmothers, and girlfriends saying the same thing. One participant wrote, "I see Mo'Nique as a mother figure who just wants to help her children."

**"Excuses" :30 seconds**



Mo'Nique: "Hey sisters, here are some lines you want to stay away from..."



"Hey, I look safe, don't I?"



"You know I ain't got nothing. You know where I've been."



"Baby, they just don't feel natural to me." Please!



"They don't make 'em big enough for me. I just ain't feeling it."



"Here's a good one: 'You know I love you, girl. You're not going to let something like this come between us.'"



"Uh-uh. I'm not hearing it. Use protection. No excuses."



**(VO):** Call 1-866-344 KNOW.

Creative: Burrell Communications Group

*Do you believe she is credible in this role? Do you believe she/he [Mo'Nique] follows the advice she/he gives you? Why or why not?*

Participants found her to be a credible in this role because according to one participant, "she is very popular and she talks about real life experiences." Participants talked about Mo'Nique's character on UPN's "The Parkers," where she plays Niki Parker and her stand-up comedy shows. Some said they felt she does follow the advice that she gives because she talked about her relationship with her husband and dating after divorce.

*Do you think entertainers in general are seen as good spokespeople to teach people about AIDS/HIV prevention? Are they better than other kinds of people: doctors, scientists, real people with HIV/AIDS?*

Participants thought that entertainers/celebrities in general were good spokespeople for the following reasons:

- They made you want to get more information.
- They provided AIDS related statistics among African-Americans.
- Celebrities more than doctors because they [celebrities] are more respected.
- Entertainment is a popular medium and people look up to entertainers.

Participants also said that although they think celebrities are good spokespeople, regular people should be used. A participant wrote, "Entertainers are great for the people because they're known worldwide. They are no better than regular people; they just have more of an effect on younger people who listen to their music or see them on television; they stand out."

A few participants said celebrities are more influential for younger people. "Younger generations are more apt to listen and/or follow the advice of their idols, than those over 18 years old."

## CHAPTER 5

### Conclusions

The topic of this thesis was AIDS in the African-American Community: Celebrities as an Effective Communication Strategy.

The objective was to determine whether celebrities are an effective strategy in delivering prevention awareness messages to the African-American Community.

AIDS has claimed and continues to claim the lives of thousands of African-Americans each day and it is necessary to find methods to decrease and eventually eliminate the spread of the disease. According to researchers and the CDC, there is no known cure to date; therefore, prevention methods are going to have to come from education, which can be gained through various means.

Celebrities are used to sell cars, sneakers, cereal, etc., but can they "sell" behavior change/protection? Can people be persuaded into protecting themselves and others against the life-altering disease?

This thesis found mixed reactions. For the most part non-celebrity and celebrity PSAs fared well: each had pros and cons. Participants liked some of the non-celebrity PSAs, but said there needs to be more realism in the commercials. They suggested; "Use people who have AIDS, show what AIDS looks like-the "good" and the bad." Participants didn't think that certain levels of humor were appropriate for such a serious topic. The researcher found PSAs were received better if they appealed to the emotions. The "Boy" and "SUV Mom" PSAs made them think about HIV/AIDS more than the humorous "Locker Room" and "Pharmacy" PSAs.

The celebrity PSAs were met with mixed reactions also. Participants said they felt celebrities were more beneficial for younger generations. It was their opinion that older people are better equipped to judge the validity of a message and don't really need celebrities to provide information.

Some participants felt that celebrities are useful, but "the best spokespeople, in any movement are those affected by it the most. The only way people will listen is if they can see, taste, smell and feel the impact of AIDS or any other life poison," wrote a participant.

While viewing the celebrity PSAs, the word "image" came up frequently during each focus panel. The PSAs were not only based on the popularity of that particular celebrity; it was based on how he or she was perceived.

Ja Rule is perceived as an irresponsible person who glorifies drug use (ecstasy) and who has misogynistic lyrics (calls women derogatory names on various songs) in his music. One participant wrote, (also sums up what the majority either wrote or stated) "If they [celebrities] rap about something other than safe sex, it means nothing."

Whether celebrities were credible or not depended on how they carried themselves and what they verbalized in public. If lyrics and/or actions don't coincide with safe sex or "responsibility," then that celebrity isn't perceived to be credible in such a role.

According to the focus panel "real people" should be used along with celebrities. "Celebrities will get the attention more so than an unknown doctor," said one participant. "But I want to see what an unhealthy person looks like as well," said other participants.



According to Frank Hawkins of AIDS Delaware, "People still do not believe it will or can happen to them. There are some that don't know how to properly use condoms and some refuse because of how using them "feels." The researcher asked, "Do you think personal service announcements should be a little more graphic in their delivery-show how a condom is used, show what full blown AIDS looks like?" Mr. Hawkins said, "Yes."

Participants repeatedly said that they want to see what AIDS looks like: not just the healthy people, but people with lesions, weight loss, etc. The PSA called "Boy" caught attention and sparked a debate during two of the three focus panels. Participants debated on how family members could have been infected with the virus. Most agreed that this PSA was the most powerful of all the non-celebrity PSAs because it was "real."

### Recommendations

1. Conduct more studies among African-Americans between 12 to 45 years of age that include print, music and music videos.
2. Conduct focus groups, surveys and interviews over a 12-month period of time.
3. Incorporate celebrities and HIV+ people in personal service announcements.
4. Produce personal service announcements that show how people with AIDS look: the healthy and unhealthy.
5. Provide the hotline numbers in the beginning and end and have them running constantly throughout the PSA.
6. Show people explaining how HIV/AIDS has changed their lives on a daily basis, i.e. medical expenses, dietary changes, etc.

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## Appendix A

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### AIDS in the African-American Community: Celebrities as an Effective Communication Strategy

1. What are the main things you know about HIV/AIDS? What else do you feel you need to know?
2. Do you know anyone with HIV/AIDS?
- 3a. What did you like about the PSAs?  
b. What did you not like about the PSAs?  
c. What new information did you learn from the PSAs?  
d. How persuasive do you think the PSAs are in getting people to protect themselves?
- 4a. What did you like about the PSAs?  
b. What did you not like about the PSAs?  
c. What new information did you learn from the PSAs?  
d. How persuasive do you think the PSAs are in getting people to protect themselves?
- 5a. What did you like about the PSAs?  
b. What did you not like about the PSAs?  
c. What new information did you learn from the PSAs?  
d. How persuasive do you think the PSAs are in getting people to protect themselves?
6. What did you think of \_\_\_\_\_'s performance or role in this PSA?
7. Do you believe she/he is credible in this role? Do you believe she/he follows the advice she/he gives you? Why or why not? Is she/he a good role model for people our age? Why/why not?
8. Do you think entertainers in general are seen as good spokespeople to teach people about AIDS/HIV prevention? Are they better than other kinds of people...doctors, scientists, real people with HIV/AIDS?

## Appendix B



January 24, 2003

Wendy Robinson  
33 Memorial Drive  
New Castle, DE 19720


Dear Ms. Robinson:

Thank you for your interest in HIV/AIDS in the African-American community. Here at BET, we are corporately committed to eradicating this devastating disease. I have enclosed information on the *Rap-It-Up (RIU) Campaign* and a copy of the RIU public service announcements.

As Black Entertainment Television's efforts in this area of concern have been recognized as "groundbreaking" and "cutting edge in approach", we have taken the lead in the entertainment industry as it relates addressing this issue. To that end, BET is not aware of any studies on the effectiveness of celebrities communicating HIV/AIDS prevention, awareness, and education messages.

If I can be of further assistance, please call me at 202.608.2735.

Sincerely,



Vikki Johnson  
Manager, Public Affairs & Events



Ms. Wendy Robinson  
33 Memorial Drive  
New Castle, DE 19720

Dear Wendy,

The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation does not have any studies that pertain to the usefulness of celebrities as a way to reach the African American community with information about HIV/AIDS. The Foundation, in its work with Black Entertainment Television, has occasionally used celebrities in some of its public service announcements, but the Foundation has no research on the celebrities' impact on the community. Best wishes on your thesis!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Laura Wiggs". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Laura Wiggs



1120 19th Street, N.W., Suite 600 • Washington, D.C. 20036 • USA

Telephone: (202) 785-0072 • Fax: (202) 785-0120 • E-Mail: [generalinfo@psiwash.org](mailto:generalinfo@psiwash.org)

February 10, 2003

To Whom It May Concern:

YouthAIDS is Population Services International's global HIV/AIDS prevention initiative targeting youth ages 15-24. This international call-to-action is a fully integrated campaign including advertising, public service announcements and events to reach youth through targeted communications. Artists and celebrity role models, including Alicia Keys, Destiny's Child and Justin Timberlake, help YouthAIDS speak to hundreds of millions of youth worldwide through public service announcements.

Wendy Robinson contacted YouthAIDS and Population Services International requesting research material for her thesis "AIDS in the Black Community: Celebrities as and Effective Communication Strategy." This is an excellent topic and our experiences have demonstrated the effectiveness of using celebrity role models to communicate education and prevention messages. Unfortunately, we were unable to locate any primary research such as reports and published studies to assist her with her research.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mara J. Brain". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mara J. Brain  
YouthAIDS, Special Projects Assistant



Working for health in the human family

---

February 3, 2003

Wendy Robinson  
33 Memorial Drive  
New Castle, DE. 19720

To Whom It May Concern:

Wendy Robinson and I met to discuss the topic "AIDS in the Black Community: Celebrities as an Effective Communication Strategy." I really enjoyed the conversation and different perspectives that she and I shared on this subject. However at no point was this subject discussed beforehand and I acknowledge that I had no prior knowledge of her topic for her thesis. Please contact me with any questions on this matter. I can be reached at 302-652-6776.

Sincerely,

Frank Hawkins  
Director of Education and Outreach



## Appendix C

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### Participant Consent Form

I \_\_\_\_\_ agree to participate in a study entitled "AIDS in the African-American Community: Celebrities as an Effective Communication Strategy," which is being conducted by Wendy A. Robinson, researcher and graduate student at Rowan University. The purpose of this study is to determine the effectiveness of celebrities delivering HIV/AIDS prevention awareness messages by comparing personal service announcements with celebrities and personal service announcements without celebrities. The data collected in this study will be used to complete a thesis statement.

My participation in the study should not exceed one hour.

I understand that my responses will be anonymous and that all the data gathered will be confidential. I agree that any information obtained from this study may be used in any way thought best for publication or education provided that I am in no way identified and my name is not used.

I understand that there are no physical or psychological risks involved in this study, and that I am free to withdraw my participation at any time without penalty.

If I have any questions or problems concerning my participation in this study I may contact Wendy A. Robinson at (919) 656-8256 (cell phone).

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature of Participant)

(Date)

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature of Researcher)

(Date)