

ADVOCACY GROUPS, ADVERTISERS AND
THE NETWORKS: THE IMPACT OF THE
AMERICAN FAMILY ASSOCIATION;
A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In the United States alone, there are 92.1 million television households and 235.23 million audience members.¹ Furthermore, advertising volume on television is over 22 million dollars.² Advocacy groups from the far left to right total around 1,000.³ Some of these groups focus on environmental issues, some on moral issues and others on subjects affecting the daily world. However, some of these groups focus on television and its advertisers.

These groups include Americans for Constitutional Freedom, the National Coalition against Television Violence, the National Coalition against Censorship, Viewers for Quality Television, Accuracy in the Media, Americans for Responsible Television, Morality in the Media, Christian Leaders for Responsible Television and the American Family

¹ Nielsen 1990 Report on Television, Nielsen Media Research 1990, 3-4.

² Based on 1987 data prepared by Robert J. Coen, McCann-Erickson, Inc. Excerpted by Sydney Head and Christopher H. Sterling, Broadcasting in America: A Survey in Electronic Media, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1990, 221.

³ Groups were randomly selected based on Aspen Handbook of 1978. The groups in this study were interviewed and asked their political persuasion. Only one of the advocacy groups said it was moderate, the others replied as being liberal or conservative.

Association. Of these groups, the last three use tactics that influence advertisers to remove sponsorship from television programs. One group in particular, the AFA, claims success stories against several of the biggest companies in the United States. The AFA uses a monitoring system of television to boycott advertisers it views as sponsors of sex, violence, profanity and un-Christian values.

Advertisers respond by saying that these groups do not affect or influence their advertising policy. The networks said that these groups do not pose a threat to advertisers or to the public.

The networks and advertisers replied that these groups censor what the public wants to see on television. Several advocacy groups against the AFA feel that the group is blackmailing advertisers. The AFA disagrees with all these points of view. So who wins this battle of content on television? The advocacy groups? The networks? The advertisers? Or the public?

Background

The networks are responsible for showing quality programs to the public. The advertisers are responsible for selling their products to the largest number of consumers. Advocacy groups are responsible for representing groups of people who are either happy or unhappy with the content of television. However, some people in the media industry and in the public feel that these advocacy groups have

overstepped their boundaries by using threats, protests and boycotts to try to change network programming.

The research literature shows that these groups do influence advertisers to remove sponsorship from television programs.⁴ Do they (the advocacy groups) have a legal right to do this? Are they morally justified in their approach? Do they represent a large constituency of people who feel the same way? Or are they, a small minority trying to influence the majority of viewers in the United States?

Some people argue that they (the advocacy groups) have a right to do what they do. George F. Will, a conservative columnist, suggests that boycotts are the only effective means for conservatives to be taken seriously by the media.⁵

Will adds that there is nothing wrong with the means that these groups take to get their point across to the networks.⁶ However, Alan Dershowitz, a law professor at Harvard, said that although boycotts are constitutionally protected, some of them are morally wrong.⁷ A man who has explained both legal and ethical ramifications of the

⁴ Meckel, Rob, "Activists Turn Up Volume on Networks," Houston Post, 11 May 1989, Newsbank, Soc 40: B14. Meckel's article and other articles written in newspapers discuss this claim and state that these groups are having an effect on the networks. A good article discussing this claim is by Geraldine Fabrikant of the New York Times, "Ads Reportedly Lost Because of Gay Scene", 14 November 1988, 16.

⁵ Kathryn C. Montgomery, Target: Prime Time, Advocacy Groups and the Struggle over Entertainment Television, New York: Oxford Press, 1989, 162.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

advocacy boycott, Rev. Donald Wildmon, said that his group has First Amendment rights to pursue this type of action.

Networks can show what they want to show. Advertisers can sponsor what they want to sponsor. And the consumer can buy what he wants to buy. Now if that's not as American as apple pie, then I might as well pack it up and move to Siberia.⁸

Purpose and Value of the Study

Can advocacy groups, in general, influence advertisers to remove sponsorship from television programs? According to Kathryn C. Montgomery, author of Target: Prime Time, Advocacy Groups and the Networks the answer is yes. The purpose of this study is to see if advocacy groups, the American Family Association, in particular, are in fact forcing advertisers to remove sponsorship from television programs.

The resulting information should be of interest to several groups. The public will be able to see what effect, if any, these groups are having on the advertisers and the networks. The findings will tell them about the organizations who claim to represent large segments of the population. Thirdly, the study will explain in detail how the networks and the advertisers are responding to this subject.

Advertising agencies should have an interest in these groups who send protest letters and boycott companies that they represent. The companies want to know if these groups

⁸ Ibid.

constitute a large segment of the public. They want to know who these groups are and what they are trying to do.

The networks should be interested because they need advertising dollars to survive. They want to know what the real effect of these groups is on their advertisers. Other advocacy groups are interested because they will be able to see how these groups operate.

Statement of the Problem

Most Americans turn on their television sets and watch their favorite television programs. They perhaps glance at the commercials and then continue to view the television. What they do not know is that some groups are attempting to change what they see on television.

Television programming is an evolutionary process with changes that affect everyone. Many people are unaware that the AFA and other advocacy groups are influencing advertisers to remove sponsorship from television. The result might be a loss of dollars for the networks and an episode or program cancelled.

This fact of revenue might be the reason that advertisers are so leery of discussing the AFA and other advocacy groups with the public.⁹

Advertisers often deny that these groups have any

⁹ Based on interviews with advertisers and advocacy groups. One company explained that they do not discuss any policies dealing with advocacy groups with anyone in the general public. Other companies hung up the phone when the topic was explained.

influence on their ad policy.¹⁰ Furthermore, they state that they have (in some cases) never heard of the AFA or their policies. However, some companies admit that they have met with this group and then, of their own accord, changed their advertising policy.

In general, the networks and the advertisers say that these groups are small and have no effect in their policy.¹¹ However, they have commissioned studies on the AFA and their followers.¹²

Advocacy groups on the left say that these groups do affect what is being seen on television. Many of them feel that what the AFA is doing is nothing more than censorship. However, advocacy groups on the right feel that they have every right under the First Amendment and free expression do to do what they want.

Methodology

This is a qualatative study of the advertisers, networks and pressure groups. Data was gathered by contacting ten advocacy groups by phone and asking questions ranging from their goals to what they think of the AFA. The advocacy groups contacted were Morality in the Media, Accuracy in the Media, Viewers for Quality Television, Americans for Constitutional Freedom, Action for Children,

¹⁰ Based on interviews with several advertisers.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Montgomery, 163.

National Coalition Against Violence, Black Citizens for a Fair Media, Media Forum and the American Family Association.¹³ The questions asked the AFA dealt directly with their policies, success stories and current plans for a boycott.

A list of thirty advertisers was then derived based upon talks with the AFA which claimed it had talked with these advertisers. This list was based on an AFA list of top ten advertisers who sponsor so-called sex, violence and profanity. These advertisers were and have been targeted for a boycott. This group was contacted.

Nine of the top ten responded in phone interviews to questions ranging from their advertising platforms to what they think of the AFA. The final questions dealt with how they would respond if they were boycotted.

The four networks were contacted and asked about their programming policy and what they think of the AFA and other advocacy groups. Some affiliates in areas where these groups thrive, were also surveyed to see if their own advertising policies had changed. Only one affiliate would comment on the issue of advocacy groups and advertisers (relating to programming policy).

¹³ The American Family Association was selected as the main focus of this study because of its large following and ability to contact the media. The group is led by the Reverend Donald Wildmon and was formally the National Federation for Decency. At the time of this study, the group had boycotted advertisers in the past and was planning to announce a boycott of an advertiser within the time frame of this analysis.

Objectives and Limitations

Limitations of this study include sampling, generalizability, method, time, means, access to sources, and reliability and validity of the sources.

A key limitation is that many companies (advertisers) refuse to discuss advertising policies publicly, when the subject deals with advocacy groups. The reasons may be that some companies are privately held, while others just plainly refuse any comment on anything about their company's policies. Many company officials will talk on subjects dealing with complaint letters, and the marketing of their products, but when it comes down to their own advertising policy, they will decline.

The network's officials will often respond the same way for unknown reasons. The main reason for refusing to speak, according to one advertising source, is that the business is so competitive many just won't talk about what is going on in television.¹⁴

The main objective of this thesis is to find out if these groups are influencing advertisers to remove their sponsorship from television programs.

Remaining Chapters

Chapter Two presents a review of literature dealing with the AFA, advertisers and the networks. Chapter Three

¹⁴ Interview with Ken Thompson, President of Thompson Publishing and former Vice-President of Thompson Advertising. Date of interview on Feb. 20, 1991.

focuses on the attempt of advocacy groups to influence the networks and their advertisers. It also discusses what other advocacy groups think of the AFA. Chapter Four examines advertisers who are among the top ten potential companies targeted for a boycott by the AFA. Chapter Four also looks at the influence of the networks and their affiliates on what is being shown to the public. It includes network views of how advertisers affect sponsorship of the programs and the network views of these advocacy groups.

Chapter Five offers a summary of the study, conclusions, and recommendations.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

In 1977, Gallup Industries polled 2,000 Americans and asked them if they would support a boycott on companies that sponsor violence on television.¹⁵ Those who were surveyed, 35 percent, said they would support a boycott of advertisers that sponsored violence on television.¹⁶ Based on the polling breakdowns, 83 percent of those people are in the non-labor force, over the age of 50, live in the west, have a grade school education, and want all violence removed from television.¹⁷ Those who have a college education background, make over \$20,000 a year, live in a medium sized city, said they would not favor a boycott (64 percent of those surveyed).¹⁸

However, a study commissioned by ABC (designed by its social research department and conducted independently by the National Survey Research Group) found that more than 91 percent of Americans would never boycott a product simply

¹⁵ American Institute of Public Opinion, The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion 1972-1977, Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources Inc., Vol. 2, 1976-1977, 19.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., 983.

¹⁸ Ibid.

because they did not like the sponsorship of a program.¹⁹ ABC, though, did not tell the advertisers that 20 percent of those polled would support a boycott against companies that sponsor offensive material.²⁰ NBC also commissioned a study to find out what Americans think of network television. The network employed the Roper Organization to ask how people felt about some of the programs that CLEAR-TV (a group created by Rev. Wildmon, works with AFA which is the stronger of the two groups) opposed.²¹

The study concluded that although many people expressed concern over excessive sex and violence there was little dissatisfaction with programming.²² The study showed that the majority of the viewing public didn't share the opinions of the coalition.²³

Recently, CBS polled 1,000 Americans in 1990 and asked them if they knew a boycott was going on against two companies.²⁴ CBS found that less than one percent of those surveyed knew a boycott was going on. They found less than two tenths of that one percent knew the name of the

¹⁹ Montgomery, 163.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., 163-4.

²⁴ Interview with Beth Bressan, V.P. of Assistant of Broadcast Company and in charge of national programming policy for CBS. 2-25-91.

companies being boycotted.²⁵

AFA also commissioned a study (conducted with questionnaires and not listing how many people they surveyed) to see if people would boycott companies.²⁶ Their results led them to believe that most Americans are willing to sponsor an action as a boycott.

So both sides disagree on whether or not Americans would support a boycott against advertisers. However, to understand the pressure group ideology, one must understand some theories on public opinion.

Public Opinion

Theories exist on how and why people join public interest groups. A lot of people do not completely understand the intensity of these groups (advocacy) in their ability to maximize public perception and attitude toward their goals.

Henry Turner said that the most significant development in an advocacy group's activities is the continual increases of these groups to use the mass media to influence public attitudes.²⁷ He said that three factors contribute to this

²⁵ Interview with Bressan, 2-25-91.

²⁶ Interview with Allen Wildmon, Director of Public Relations at the AFA, 12-20-90.

²⁷ Henry Turner, "How Pressure Groups Operate," The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, Vol. V, 319, Sept. 1958, 64 and 68-72. Excerpted from Edward Walker, John Lindquist, Roy Morey and Donald Walker, Readings in American Public Opinion, New York: American Book Company, 1968, 80-81.

development:

1. The increasing awareness on the part of the interest-group leaders that public opinion is an entity which must be considered.²⁸
2. The development and refinement of new propaganda techniques and devices.²⁹
3. The revolutionary changes in communication media which make it possible for literally millions of Americans to be reached daily via television, radio, the motion pictures, newspapers and periodicals.³⁰

Joseph Turow said in most cases advocacy groups localize the issue, then move toward a wider area to gather support. He calls the initial phase the "collective behavior," which is the "relatively unstructured, temporary, emotion-laden and keenly interpersonal social situations, such as crowds, riots, rumors, public opinion and social movements."³¹

Neil Smelser suggests there are several determinants that must be present in order for collective behavior to exist.

- 1) structured conduciveness (the form of collective behavior must be physically and socially possible.)
- 2) structural strain (within the context of the conduciveness there must be some social psychological disequilibrium, inconsistency, or conflict.)

²⁸ Ibid., 81.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Joseph Turow, Media Industries, New York: Longman Inc., 1984, 89-90.

3) growth and spread of a generalized brief precipitating factors (an event or situation must focus the generalized belief more clearly, or give evidence that the source of the strain is correctly identified and labeled.)

5) mobilization of participants for action (events and/or leader's must develop and implement a course of action based on the generalized belief--that is, a course seen to be able to alleviate strain.)

4) the operating of social control (counter determinants to the first five stages must be activated that shape the form, direction, and intensity of the collective behavior.)³²

Louis Zurcher, Jr. and his colleagues said that the collective behavior most often used by advocacy groups would be norm-oriented social movement.³³ According to Zurcher, advocacy groups focus their demands on the mass media, thus creating a social movement. Furthermore, he said that norm-oriented social movement is characterized by "aims at restoring, protecting, modifying or creating norms in the name of a generalized belief."³⁴ It is this attempt according to Zurcher that most advocacy groups use to influence norms directly or induce some type of constituted authority to do so.³⁵

Warren Breed and James DeFoe said that pressure groups try to seek advancement of their interests and the image of

³² Ibid., 90.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., 91.

³⁵ Ibid., 91.

their members.³⁶ They do this according to Breed by influencing media content through several dimensions:

Power: Does the group have the clout to place pressure on the media threatening the loss of audience and therefore advertising support?

Purpose: What population segments would benefit from the changed content: most, or a small member?

Range of Ideas: Does the group seek to broaden the range of ideas determined, or to narrow it?

Knowledge basis: Does the group utilize objective knowledge based on systematic samples, or material gained from selected cases?

Methods Used: Does the group discuss all relevant issues-- including the involving audience appeal--with media personnel in an open and collegial manner, or does it use an adversarial manner, with threats of boycotts and headlined charges in the media?³⁷

Breed added that a 1981 conference sponsored by the television industry conceded that special interest groups have a right to seek their goals through the media.³⁸

However, based on Breed's research, television executives voiced strong objections to the interest groups methodology to get their point across to the public. Breed said that he found resentment on the part of television executives towards pressure groups who were attempting to gain a narrow self-interest by using pressure on the media.³⁹

Breed said that television executives will often allow

³⁶ Warren Breed and James R. DeFoe, "Effecting Media Change: The Role of Cooperative Consultation on Alcohol Topics," Journal of Communication, Spring 1982, 88.

³⁷ Ibid., 89.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., 90.

short-run changes while the pressure is on and then resume former practices when the pressure subsides.⁴⁰

Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann said that the mass media is at fault for creating advocacy groups via public opinion. Neumann bases this idea on her theory of spiral of silence. This theory is the mainstay of modern public opinion, according to Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi.⁴¹ In her writings the individual (or in this case the advocacy group) tries to find isolation by 'quasi-statistical organ'.⁴² This is done by observing their social environment, assessing the distribution of opinions for and against their ideas, evaluation of strength (commitment), the urgency and the chances of success of certain proposals and viewpoints.⁴³

Her findings on public opinion are based on five hypotheses and correlate the strength of her work.

1. Individuals form a picture of the distribution of opinion in their social environment and of the trend of opinion. They observe which views are gaining strength and which are declining. This is a prerequisite for the existence or development of public opinion as the interaction of individual views and the supposed view of the environment.

2. Willingness to expose one's views publicly varies according to the individual's assessment of the frequency distribution and the trend of opinions in his social environment. It is greater if he believes his own view is, and will be, the dominating one or is

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, "Reflections on Spiral of Silence," Communication Yearbook 14, 288-297.

⁴² Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann, "The Spiral of Silence: A theory of Public Opinion," Journal of Communication, Spring 1974, Vol. 24:2, 44.

⁴³ Ibid.

becoming more widespread.

3. From this once can further deduce that if the assessment of the current distribution of opinion and the actual distribution are clearly divergent, it is because the opinion whose strength is overestimated is displayed more in public.

4. There is a positive correlation between the present and the future assessment: if an opinion is considered to be the prevailing one, it is likely to be considered the future one also, but to varying degrees. The weaker the correlation, the more public opinion is going through a process of change.

5. If there is a divergence in the assessment of the present and future strengths of a particular view, it is the expectation of the future position which will determine the extent to which the individual is willing to expose himself. If he is convinced that the trend of opinion is moving his way, the risk of isolation is of little significance.⁴⁴

Neumann added that this type of public opinion "is the opinion which can be voiced in public without fear of sanctions and upon which action in the public can be based."⁴⁵

It is on this response from Neumann that Forrest Chisman bases his study on public interest intervention. Chisman says there are three views in which public opinion and interest upon the media industry can be based: optimistic, pessimistic and meliorist.⁴⁶

1. Optimistic holds that policy problems are due simply to innocent shortcomings of the policy-making bodies. A person who holds an optimistic view believes that research input, discussions bringing together interested parties, and attempts to assist decision makers in long range planning can influence policy and

⁴⁴ Ibid., 45.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 44.

⁴⁶ Forrest Chisman, "Public Policy and FCC Policy Making," Journal of Communication, Winter 1977, Vol. 27:1, 78.

that they are the kinds of activities public interest groups should engage in.

2. Pessimistic holds that those involved in the process are essentially venal, self-interested political time servers. A pessimistic viewed person believes that political action, litigation, and pressures for structural reform of decision making bodies are the forms of activity most likely to bring results.

3. Meliorist holds that decision makers are complex creatures with a variety of motivations. A meliorist person would argue for a mixed strategy aimed at broad goals.⁴⁷

Chisman said that all three views are correct at some point, depending on the group's goals and interests.⁴⁸ Most of the special interest groups are challenging television with special concerns for advertisers who sponsor programming they deem offensive.

Robert L. Schrag said that the interests of these pressure groups has made television a battleground.⁴⁹ He said that the problem is that the networks and consumers have come to believe that they are natural adversaries.⁵⁰

Schrag's own theory called "rational advocacy criticism," is a direct response to advocacy groups that their methods fail to work.⁵¹ It is based on two assumptions:

1. The idea that public outcry by a vocal minority will

⁴⁷ Ibid., 78-79.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 80.

⁴⁹ Robert Schrag, "Detente in Television: A Critic's Obligation," Journal of Broadcasting, Fall 1982, Vol. 26:4, 831.

⁵⁰ Ibid., pg. 833

⁵¹ Ibid., 836.

result in the cancellation of an 'objectionable' but highly-rated program is unrealistic.

2. Highly-rated programs generate spin-offs and copy-cat programs which tend to echo the world view presented by the parent program.⁵²

Schrag said that advocacy groups can counterattack based on these three objectives:

1. Increase the audience of the programs the critic has analyzed and chosen to advocate.

2. Encourage the development and broadcasting of similar programs.

3. Encourage direct audience expression of support for the programs.⁵³

Schrag's ideas spring from his conviction that confrontational strategies do more harm than good.⁵⁴

Furthermore, Schrag said that television was not created for entertainment, but rather for money. "Commercial television...is just that commercial. The companies exist to turn a profit, and they earn this profit by selling audiences to advertisers," said Schrag.⁵⁵

Broadcast historian, Erik Barnouw and economist William Melody recognize advertisers as the most dominant force in television. "A vast television industry has grown up and around the needs and wishes of sponsors," said Barnouw.⁵⁶ It is because of this reason that today's advocacy groups

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 836-7.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 831.

⁵⁶ Erik Barnouw, The Sponsor: Notes on a Modern Potentate, New York: Oxford University Press, 1978, 4.

focus on the advertisers, rather than the networks.

Strategies of the Advocacy Groups

Anne Branscomb and Maria Savage in 1978 found that most of television advocacy groups are concerned about program quality, format, and stereotyping.⁵⁷ They said the tactics and strategies the groups choose reflect their goals and concerns.

Those interested in programming improvements use monitoring, evaluation, and criticism techniques, pressure on the broadcast and advertising industries, and awards to those broadcasters and advertisers who demonstrate concern.⁵⁸

Henry Turner said that advocacy groups use techniques of propaganda to achieve their goals. He said that they use propaganda to accomplish their short-term tactical goals and their long-term strategy.⁵⁹ From a tactical standpoint a public relations campaign can have two kinds of results, he said.

1. It may give the impression there is such broad public support for a proposal that the campaign itself will result in the effectuation of the desired policy.

2. Or, the campaign may activate citizenry where they will demand through letters, telegrams, and other means that the officials make the decision wished by the organized group.⁶⁰

Turner said the long-term goals of a public relations

⁵⁷ Anne W. Branscomb and Maria Savage, "The Broadcast Reform Movement: At The Crossroads," Journal of Communication, Autumn 1978, 28.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Turner, 81.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

campaign tends to be ideological.⁶¹ He argued "...in effect, they wish to condition the attitudes of the people so a state of public opinion will be created in which the public will almost automatically respond with favor toward programs desired by the group and reject programs opposed by the group,".⁶²

History of Advocacy Groups

It is difficult to say exactly how many television advocacy groups there are in 1991. Estimates are that more than 250 groups exist in the United States.⁶³ Montgomery said there are some four categories of media reform groups in the country:

1. Minorities, women, gays, seniors, disabled. This group sees television as a cultural mirror which did not reflect their image accurately. To be absent from prime time, to be marginally included in it, or to be treated badly by it are seen as serious threats to their rights as citizens. Examples of this category include the National Organization for Women, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the National Gay Task Force.
2. Conservative religious groups. This group sees television as a threat to traditional values. Examples of this category are the Moral Majority and the National Federation for Decency (now the American Family Association).
3. Social Issue Groups. This group sees television as an electronic classroom, in which lessons are taught by heroes of prime time. Examples are the Population Institute and the Solar Lobby.
4. Anti-Violence Groups. This group fears that

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Montgomery, 6.

continued exposure to violence on television will lead to a more violent society. Examples of this group are the American Medical Association, the PTA, and the National Coalition Against Television Violence.⁶⁴

These categories do not completely represent all media reform groups in this country. Some groups deal only with licensing of television stations, while others promote equal access on the air for their members. However, while they might disagree on different strategies and tactics for their cause, there have been some successful moves by the media reformers.

According to Branscomb, special interest groups have had some success in the way television is shaped.

- 1) More vigorous enforcement of the Fairness Doctrine as watchdog groups and individuals exert their rights to hear conflicting views on issues of public importance.
- 2) Improved network operating standards for news and public affairs, greater willingness to air corrections of errors, and increased responsiveness to letters of complaint about news distortion and error.
- 3) Withdrawal of ads by corporate advertisers concerned about the impact of violent episodes on viewers.
- 4) Defeat of broadcasters' efforts to obtain five-year licenses and to avoid the danger of comparative hearings at renewal time.
- 5) In children's television since 1967, the establishment of a consortium of public agencies and private foundations, fewer commercials on children's programs, and a mounting awareness of and concern over the effect of television on

⁶⁴ Ibid., 8-9.

children.⁶⁵

Other successes include greater diversification of ownership, more minority hiring in television, innovations in news coverage, modification of the equal time requirements of the Communications Act, and more public affairs programs.⁶⁶

History of the start of advocacy groups (dealing with television) remains sketchy and grey. However, according to Branscomb the first advocacy group was the National Association for Better Broadcasting, formed in 1949.⁶⁷ The group was formed to pursue the public's interest in television. In 1953, the second group was founded, the American Council for Better Broadcasters.⁶⁸ Originally, the groups could do little more than disseminate and tabulate audience concerns about television (on account of the FCC refusal to admit representatives of the public in administrative meetings).⁶⁹

Then in a landmark decision in 1966, (*United Church of Christ vs WLBT*) (359 F. 2d 994, 1005 [D.C. Circuit 1966]) the Court of Appeals ruled that the FCC was required to

⁶⁵ Branscomb and Savage, 30-31. The Fairness Doctrine expired in 1988 and is perhaps the reason that television advocacy groups are maintaining campaigns against the networks and their advertisers for quality television.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 25.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

permit citizens to participate in Commission proceedings.⁷⁰

In 1964, a coalition of civil rights groups filed a petition with the FCC asking the Commission to deny license renewal of TV station WBLT in Jackson, Miss. These groups claimed that WBLT's owners had blatantly discriminated against blacks in hiring and programming. UCC lead the challenge against the station and it's goal was to use regulatory mechanisms to force television to be responsive to the public. The FCC gave the station a renewal of a one-year license without allowing the advocacy groups a hearing. The UCC appealed the case to the United States Court of Appeals and was victorious.⁷¹

After this ruling, media reform groups such as Action For Children's Television, the Gray Panther Media Task Force, and the Media Coalition for the National Organization of Women were founded.⁷²

According to Branscomb, a majority of the media reform groups which appeared in the late sixties reflected the needs of the minorities to be heard by a larger audience.⁷³ These needs are reflected, today by the American Family Association and other media reform groups. However, these groups have now changed their focus from license challenges to sponsor removal from television.

Advertising

Advertising is an integral part in the television industry. According to several members of the media, the

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Montgomery, 23.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid., 26.

networks are on a downward trend and are expected to droip below 60 percent in the next ten years.⁷⁴

These are important numbers to remember in understanding the power advertisers have on the networks. The advertisers pit the networks against each other in attempts to receive the lowest cost per show. Because network incomes are heavily dependent upon the sale of advertising time to advertisers, the advocacy groups focus their attention on the sponsors.⁷⁵ The bottom line from the networks is that the larger the audience (public) the more attractive the commercial time, the more the network may charge and the higher potential for sales.⁷⁶

Joseph Turow said there are three types of sponsorship in which an advertiser may choose to air its spots.

1. Full Sponsorship. Where one or more advertisers associate themselves completely with a show and pay the network for the show's entire period every time it is broadcasted.
2. Participating Sponsorship. Where advertisers do not maintain continuing association with a show and instead buy from the network commercial spots between segments of particular program episodes.
3. Sustaining Sponsorship. Where the network supports a program while not expecting or finding advertisers

⁷⁴ Based on interviews with several advertisers and also based on the Neilsen Media Research, of 1990. It is interesting to note, that Ronald T. Rust and Naras V. Echambadi, believe that the networks will increase their audience share by the year 2000. Ronald T. Rust and Naras V. Echambadi, "Scheduling Network Television Programs: A Heuristic Audience Flow Approach to Maximizing Audience Share," Journal of Advertising, Vol. 18, Number 2, 1989, 11.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

for it.⁷⁷

Because of differing types of sponsorship, sometimes advertisers might not be aware of what type of program on which their ad has appeared. Muriel Cantor said that although advertising agencies no longer make pilot films or rarely sponsor an entire show, they (advertisers) are important to network television.⁷⁸ Cantor said that the networks are dependent on advertising revenue for economic survival.⁷⁹

Joseph Turow said that this dependency is the reason advocacy groups boycott advertisers. According to Turow, advertisers are nervous about being on someone's "hit list."⁸⁰ He said that because boycotting is something new to the advertisers, perhaps this could be the reason it has been so successful.⁸¹ Cantor's evidence is that in 1977, J. Walter Thompson (one of the biggest advertising agencies in the country) advised its clients not to sponsor violent programs.⁸² Turow pointed out the irony that studies have shown that the public has a higher recall of commercials with shows that have violence over shows that do not portray

⁷⁷ Turow (Sponsorship Forms), 382.

⁷⁸ Muriel Cantor, "Politics of Popular Drama," Communication Research, October 1978, 403.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Turow (Media Industries) 110.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Cantor, 403.

any violence.⁸³

Boycotts

When radio was created in the early twenties (Congress designated the airwaves to be public property), advertising, not the public's interest became the driving force and influenced programming.⁸⁴ When television appeared on the scene advertising once again became a major force. Television as a medium for merchandising created a conflict. A conflict between public responsibility and private profits which eventually transformed television programming into a political mine field.⁸⁵ Sponsors had direct control over program content and often changed scripts that reflected negatively upon their products.⁸⁶

When this direct control over programming occurred the public was upset. First person do to something about it was Laurence A. Johnson, owner of supermarkets in New York. Johnson decided that he was not going to allow advertisers to control programming, so he decided to place signs next to certain products on his shelves, warning customers that purchasing these goods would spread communism.⁸⁷

Johnson followed his sign placement by making regular trips to Madison Avenue and telling advertisers whom to hire

⁸³ Turow (Media Industries) 111.

⁸⁴ Montgomery, 13.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 14.

and not to hire.⁸⁸ Most of the companies willingly cooperated and justified it by stating that it was good business.⁸⁹

This form of blacklisting showed the vulnerability of advertisers, who feared the loss of product sales. It would be the tip of the iceberg for the next forty years.

In 1951, black groups led by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), attempted to protest the Amos and Andy show on CBS.⁹⁰ By stating that the show depicted negroes in a stereotypical manner, the civil rights groups tried everything from letter-writing campaigns, lawsuits and finally a national boycott against the show's sponsor, but their efforts failed.⁹¹

By the end of the fifties prime-time television was under attack: from black groups, anti-communists and a host of others who criticized the new medium for commercial excesses and violent content.⁹²

The balance of power shifted to the advocacy groups and by the seventies this clash of power of forces turned television into a "contested zone."⁹³

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Arnold Shankman, "Black Pride and Protest: The Amos 'n' Andy Crusade," Journal of Popular Culture, Fall 1978, 248-249.

⁹¹ Montgomery, 14.

⁹² Ibid., 6.

⁹³ Ibid.

When the television show "Maude" appeared on CBS in the early seventies, pro-choice and right-to-life activists clashed over abortion and the network. However, the big blow came in 1977 with "Soap" and ABC.⁹⁴

"Soap" was a television show with a slew of characters that had groups all over the country in an outrage. The show featured a married man who sleeps around and a son (played by Billy Crystal) who is gay and wants a sex-change operation. The show was the focus of church groups and the National Gay Task Force, the National Citizens Committee for Broadcasting and the PTA.⁹⁵

The result from these three groups showed the power that advocacy groups have on the networks. The NCCB and the PTA refused to sponsor a boycott, but the NGTF decided to employ tactics that left few wondering about the early fifties. The NGTF contacted the network and threatened another boycott attempt unless certain portions of the show were deleted.⁹⁶ Unhappy with the response from the network, the NGTF took out an ad in Variety to protest the show.⁹⁷

This course of action and the fact that they had the backing of the NCCB and PTA caused ABC to change the program. In a letter written to the GMTF (Gay Male Task Force) from ABC the following changes were promised and in

⁹⁴ Ibid., 5.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 5, 108, 250.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 98.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

fact did occur (the letter was then written in a memo from the GMTF to the NGTF and the key parts listed here).

They are going to have Jodie (the gay character) drop the sex-change operation idea after the first couple of episodes, the character of Jodie is going to be strengthened; he's going to confront his father who treats him like a doormat, and his brother who doesn't want to know he's gay and Jodie is going to have a relationship with a non-stereotypical football player.⁹⁸

Despite this guarantee of changing the programming ABC still received 32,000 letters of protest spearheaded by the Rev. Wildmon which were, as Todd Gitlin reports, sufficiently potent.⁹⁹

By the end of the seventies struggles among network programmers, advertisers and advocacy groups were fought on the following shows: "The Untouchables", "Chico and the Man", "Jesus of Nazareth", "Streets of LA", "Policewoman", "Playing for Time", "Marcus Welby M.D.", "Cagney and Lacey", and "Soap".¹⁰⁰

It was 1979, when the Rev. Donald Wildmon and his organization the National Federation for Decency (later the AFA) stepped into the limelight and proved that they were here to try to influence the networks and the advertisers.

It was that year that Wildmon heard that CBS planned to adapt the novel Flesh and Blood into a movie. NFD protested the film, picketed CBS headquarters and wrote to the top 250 advertisers warning them about the consequences of

⁹⁸ Ibid., 242.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 250.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 5.

sponsoring the movie.¹⁰¹ CBS postponed the movie, blaming production problems, but finally aired the movie with the most explicit scene edited out.¹⁰²

Wildmon then denounced "Woman's Room", a movie that was to be shown on ABC. Following his objections to the movie, letters of protest started to flood into the network.¹⁰³ According to Brandon Stoddard, ABC lost ten out of fourteen minutes of "Woman's Room" spot ads before the air date, the result of Wildmon's crusade.¹⁰⁴

In 1983, ABC planned to show the movie "A Day After", about a nuclear war centered in Kansas City, Missouri. This announcement sparked a furor felt throughout the United States. Reed Irvine, head of Accuracy in Media, lambasted the movie and demanded equal time.¹⁰⁵ Wildmon and his followers sent 80,000 letters of protest to ABC and called for a national boycott of the show's sponsors.¹⁰⁶

What ABC did to remove itself from the controversy can still be felt today, because FOX followed suit ("Married with Children", received high ratings following the controversy with Terry Rakolta). ABC capitalized on the audience's interest generated by the controversy, by

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 155.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 250.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 5.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 5.

following the movie with a special panel discussion.¹⁰⁷

In 1981, the Rev. Wildmon decided the time had come to threaten the largest boycott of sponsors in the history of television. His group CLEAR-TV (he now uses AFA as his main group) announced through the media that they were going to pick a company that sponsored sex, violence and un-Christian morals on television.

Within one week after the announcement four of the largest companies in the United States conferred with Wildmon in hopes of not being on the boycott list (Warner-Lambert, Smith Kline, Gillette and Phillips Petroleum).¹⁰⁸ Why fear from the corporate giants? Well, Wildmon claimed that five million Americans were already committed to participate in the boycott and that 15 million more sympathized with their cause.¹⁰⁹

Kent F. Mitchell of General Foods responded with fear that his company was going to be targeted for a boycott. "We are nervous....at a time when the public is very uncomfortable about losing control of their lives and with something called the new Moral Majority coming in to alienate as few people as possible."¹¹⁰

As one advertising executive put it, "I don't think my company's going to be nailed, but God help the companies

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 5.

¹⁰⁸ William A. Henry III, "Another Kind of Ratings War," Time, Vol. 118, July 6, 1981, 17.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 17.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 164.

that are."¹¹¹

For the next nine months, advertisers stood and waited for the announcement to come, then in 1982 the bombshell hit the networks courtesy of Wildmon's coalition.

Procter & Gamble announced that it had withdrawn sponsorship from 50 television shows during that season (1981) because they contained sex, violence and profanity.¹¹² Owen Butler, chairperson of P&G, stated at an industry meeting that he believed that the coalition (CLEAR-TV) expressed some important beliefs and that his fellow ad associates should follow and do the same.¹¹³

CBS responded with rhetoric of censorship on the part of Wildmon.¹¹⁴ Interestingly, Action for Children's Television, a well-known advocacy group, refused to go along with Rev. Wildmon's boycott.

The Coalition for Better Television is trying to dictate what the American public may, or may not, watch on television. Perhaps no one will miss the first program forced off the air in the name of morality. But the New Right's censorship crusade will not stop there. What will be the next target? A production of "Streetcar Named Desire"? A documentary on teenage pregnancy? The news?¹¹⁵

At the last minute, Wildmon decided not to boycott the advertisers, but rather decided to boycott a network's

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Harriet Van Horne, "The Moral Majority and US", TV Quarterly, Spring 1981, Vol. 18, 67.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 71.

owner.

They chose NBC's parent company RCA for excluding Christian values on television.¹¹⁶ According to Montgomery, the boycott did not have any effects on RCA. In fact, sales were reported up for the year (earnings were up 75% in 1982 and network earnings were up for the first time in four years).¹¹⁰

After this incident, it appeared that all was lost for the advocacy group's influence on advertisers and network programming. However, in 1987, Rev. Wildmon once again made headlines by announcing a boycott of two advertisers. His reasoning was that these advertisers sponsored sex and excessive violence on television.

According to Bob Melvin, director of CLEAR-TV, the boycott of Noxell Corp. and Mazda Motor Company of America were successful.¹¹¹ Albert Goldberg of Mazda Information Bureau, says it is true CLEAR-TV brought to its attention, the amount of violence in the programming, but the company acted on its own accord.¹¹²

However, Deborah Altford of Noxell, states that after talks with CLEAR-TV the company formalized an existing policy to remove sponsorship from shows that have excessive

¹¹⁶ Montgomery, 171.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., pg. 173

¹¹¹ "Christian Groups Put Squeeze on Advertisers to Limit Undesirable Programming," White River Junction Valley News (Vermont), May 19, 1989, Newsbank Soc 40: B10, 1989.

¹¹² Ibid.

violence and profanity.¹¹³

In recent years CLEAR-TV has sponsored several boycotts of companies. Recently, they have tried boycotts against Clorox and Mennen for advertising on "Miami Vice" and "Tour of Duty."¹¹⁴ Although the boycott did not succeed in the pullout of advertising on those shows, neither Mennen nor Clorox increased advertising expenditures or marketing plans in 1989.¹¹⁵

Currently AFA has announced boycotts of three companies, based on the amount of sex, violence and profanity they sponsor on the networks. Burger King, General Motors and General Foods are being besieged by letters and protests from the members of CLEAR-TV and AFA.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Geraldine Fabrikant, "Ads Reportedly Lost Because of Gay Scene," New York Times, November 14, 1989, Section D, 21.

¹¹⁵ Thomas R. King, "So Far 'New Puritanism' Isn't Attracting Pilgrims," Wall Street Journal, September 5, 1989, Section B1 and B4, 1 and 4.

¹¹⁶ Interview with Allen Wildmon, September 17, 1990.

CHAPTER III

ADVOCACY GROUPS

This study used telephone interviews to contact advocacy groups about their organization's goals and strategies. They were also asked their opinion on the Rev. Donald Wildmon and his organization, the AFA. The respondents included: Americans for Constitutional Freedom, Accuracy in Media, American Family Association, Viewers for Quality Television, Morality in the Media, National Coalition Against Censorship, and National Coalition Against Television Violence.

Each group represents different platforms, but basically, with the exception of VQT, the same goals. Below are the group's individual platforms based on interviews and research.

National Coalition Against Censorship is an alliance of national organizations, including religious, educational, professional, artistic, labor and civil rights groups. United by a conviction that freedom of thought, inquiry, and expression must be defended, they work to educate their own members about the dangers of censorship and how to oppose it. As a Coalition, they strive to create a climate of opinion hospitable to First Amendment freedoms in the broader community.¹¹⁷ Accuracy in the Media is a non-profit, non-partisan organization founded in 1969 to combat inaccurate, distorted and unfair reporting by the major media. AIM has filled numerous fairness

¹¹⁷ Pamphlet distributed by the National Coalition Against Censorship, received 12/17/91.

doctrine complaints with the FCC. It has pressed the three networks to adopt stronger codes of ethics and to employ ombudsmen. Recently, AIM placed ads in all the major dailies asking CNN to remove Peter Arnett from Baghdad.¹¹⁸

Morality in the Media is a national interfaith organization interested in obscenity and violence on television. It is unhappy with the amount of pornography that exists in television and in the United States. It focuses on pornography at all levels and ask its members to complain and boycott those companies that it believes, sponsor pornography and violence on television.¹¹⁹

National Coalition Against Television Violence is opposed to sex and gratuitous violence on television. It writes studies on violence and is quoted by many of the advocacy groups, including the AFA. The group says it is conservative and it believes in the First Amendment. The group claims to have a large following, but with the exception of the two horror shows (mentioned later) it usually does not boycott. It believes that many companies are unaware that they sponsor violence on television which is harmful to children. It studies the effects of violence on children.¹²⁰

American Family Association is a Christian organization promoting the Biblical ethic of decency in American society with primary emphasis on television and other media. The group uses a monitoring system to screen shows that contain sex, violence, profanity and un-christian morals in their shows. It claims to have a membership of three million and often ask its members to write/call and complain to companies that sponsor this type of material. The group often uses protests and boycotts to get its point across to the advertisers. The group believes that it has the First Amendment right to do this and will continue to work in that manner. The group publishes the American Family Association Journal monthly. The journal contains comment by Wildmon,

¹¹⁸ Interview with Bernard Yoh, Director of Communications, 12-11-90. Additional information from local media (dealing with the Peter Arnett episode).

¹¹⁹ Interview with Betty Wein, Morality in the Media, 12-20-91.

¹²⁰ Interview with Brian Sullivan, National Coalition Against Television Violence, 12-11-90.

articles reprinted from other newspapers dealing with its topics, and current protests and complaints to companies that advertise on television (it also includes the name of the person to contact, their address and the company's phone number).¹²¹

Americans for Constitutional Freedom is an association that defends the First Amendment right to publish and sell books and magazines that contain some element of sexual explicitness, but are not obscene according to U.S. Supreme Court standards. The group is opposed to censorship. The group has clashed with the AFA on numerous occasions. The group is also against the boycotting of advertisers on television. The organization is a voice for the trade, including most of the booksellers, book and periodical publishers, and periodical wholesalers and distributors in the United States.¹²²

Viewers for Quality Television is an organization that supports quality programming on television. It has an awards show that gives out awards to quality entertainers on television. The group is opposed to the AFA. It sends letters and compliments to advertisers that do advertise on programming that it feels is entertaining and have quality on television.¹²³

The Debate on Television

"We think that the tactic Rev. Donald Wildmon has chosen is really an effort to blackmail advertisers into making decisions for millions of people based on their fear of what he might say about them," said Christopher Finan,

¹²¹ Journal courtesy of the American Family Association, dated August 1990. Additional information courtesy of Allen Wildmon, 1-18-91.

¹²² Pamphlet courtesy of the Media Coalition and the Americans for Constitutional Freedom, 12-19-90. Additional information courtesy of Christopher Finan, 12-11-90.

¹²³ Interview with Dorthy Swanson, President and Founder of Viewers for Quality Television, 12-11-90.

Executive Director of Media Coalition.¹²⁴ Finan represents an advocacy group whose members are primarily trade associations from the communication fields.

Finan said that the Rev. Donald Wildmon and his organization CLEAR-TV really browbeat advertisers and force them to remove sponsorship from all types of programs.¹²⁵ Finan said he believes that the advertisers are in a no-win situation.

His pattern (Wildmon) has been he asks for one thing and once that is granted he moves on to the next and that his demands are progressive and that the capitulation of advertisers to Wildmon's demands will only lead to more demands in the future. Our feeling is that Wildmon is an extremist and that if he had his way, he would completely reshape the content of television, doing away with most of the popular programming on television. That is a no-win situation on the part of the advertisers and the public.¹²⁶

Dorothy Swanson, President and Founder of Viewers for Quality Television agreed that Wildmon is blackmailing advertisers and placing them in a no-win situation. "Well it is certainly an attempt to make the advertisers run scared. I think it is an attempt to censor advertisers and make them very nervous."¹²⁷

However, Allen Wildmon, Director of Public Relations for AFA and CLEAR-TV, disagreed with that point of view.

It sounds like Berlin (referring to Media

¹²⁴ Phone interview on 12/11/90 with Christopher M. Finan, Executive Director of Media Coalition.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Interview with Dorothy Swanson, President and Founder of Viewers for Quality Television, 12-11-90.

Coalition). Why is it ok for the Screenwriters Guild to ask for a boycott against the networks? Then ask the people not to support the network advertisers? They ask for the identical same thing we do and that is ok, it's ok for the major corporations all over America to boycott South Africa, it's ok to boycott lettuce in California, but when we ask for a boycott of companies who sell pornography or advertisers who help pay for sex, violence, and profanity on television, all the sudden it becomes censorship.¹²⁸

This topic of censorship divides advocacy groups from one other. On the left, groups like Media Coalition and National Coalition against Censorship believe that what Wildmon is doing is nothing more than censoring television based on what he views as correct and honest. On the right, groups like Accuracy in Media and Morality in the Media believe that Wildmon has every right to do make the public aware of the lack of sensitivity on television.

Other groups such as the National Coalition against Television Violence hold that Wildmon does not have the right to censor because this is America and not the Soviet Union. However, they agree that the problem cannot be solved by the basic argument.

"We don't agree with it being blackmail, this is a free country and we can state how we feel about a show and the content of the show," said Brian Sullivan of NCTV¹²⁹. Sullivan directly related that the problem of censorship relates directly to the terminology of free expression.

¹²⁸ Phone Interview with Allen Wildmon, Director of Public Relations, of AFA and CLEAR-TV. Interview conducted on 1/18/91.

¹²⁹ Interview with Brian Sullivan, National Coalition against Television Violence, 12-11-90.

"Basically, people, the detractors will say, listen, turn off the set. Well there is a lot more to it than that. It is actually a very narrow viewpoint, in determining that kind of debate."¹³⁰

Finan agreed that there is a terminology problem regarding censorship. "Our view is that people should have, and he has, the perfect right to advocate his own position, but when he advocates things that compromise my rights under the First Amendment, then that is censorship."¹³¹

However Bernard Yoh, Director of Communications for Accuracy in Media, disagreed with that point of view.

Censorship really applies to government because any organization or group or public interest group cannot really censor anybody; they don't have the power to. They can only raise objections to certain slants, twists, presentations that they consider immoral or bad to society. It is objections to certain kinds of tone or special programs and that is not censorship.¹³²

Betty Wein of Morality in the Media agreed with AIM that what Wildmon is doing is not censorship. "Censorship is illegal; it is just another word that is thrown around in a totally inaccurate sense, it's a red herring. No one is exercising any censorship in terms against the networks."¹³³

Dorothy Swanson of VQT says that her group is opposed to the Rev. Wildmon and that what he is doing is wrong. "We

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Interview with Christopher M. Finan, Americans for Constitutional Freedom, 12-11-90.

¹³² Interview with Bernard Yoh, Accuracy in the Media, 12-11-90.

¹³³ Interview with Betty Wein, Morality in the Media, 12-20-90.

believe in turning the dial, not censoring."¹³⁴

Are the networks involved in censoring the American public when they listen to the demands of advocacy groups? Are the networks living up to being socially responsible to the general population? Allen Wildmon doesn't think so; in his view the networks are uncaring and just in the business for the profits.

They (the networks) are not there to entertain. They will tell you that they are, but they are there to make a dollar bill. I mean that if television doesn't have any effect on society, then a company wouldn't spend \$700,000 dollars on a thirty second spot on the Super Bowl. They couldn't care a less about what television is teaching our children or people who are going to make up our society. They really do not care.¹³⁵

Dorothy Swanson said that the networks do not maintain the socially responsible attitude that they claim to protect. In her view, the networks often demean their audience, instead of educate them. "I don't like that the networks feel they have to appeal to the lowest common denominator in terms of its intelligence of audience. I think that the system is basically flawed."¹³⁶

Betty Wein, of Morality in the Media agreed that the system is flawed and the networks are not living up to the promise of being socially responsible to the public.

If they are so bankrupt that they can't provide material that uplifts, I think the least we can expect

¹³⁴ Interview with Dorothy Swanson, Viewers for Quality Television, 12-11-90.

¹³⁵ Interview with Allen Wildmon, American Family Association, 1-18-91.

¹³⁶ Interview with Dorothy Swanson, Viewers for Quality Television, 12-11-90.

them to do is not saturate the airwaves that is corrupting an entire generation of children.¹³⁷

Bernard Yoh of Accuracy in the Media also believed that the networks negatively use their power social responsibility. He believed that the dollar speaks louder than the social conscience. "They want to make life miserable for a lot of people. They want to scare the hell out of people. Everything has a price tag on it, that's just the way it works."¹³⁸

In the view of Christopher Finan, the networks do have a social responsibility and maintain this responsibility not only to the public, but also to the FCC.

I think this is primary! The networks have a lot of responsibility, they have responsibility to the FCC and a First Amendment responsibility. I believe this is paramount, because they hold the widest variety of views that are compatible with the mass media.¹³⁹

Do advocacy groups think Rev. Donald Wildmon is doing the right thing when he boycotts these advertisers?

"Oh indeed, I think it is fantastic, I say Bravo!! I think that we have every right to protest television material which spits in the face of the Judaeo-Christian code."¹⁴⁰

Bernard Yoh of AIM concured in his evaluation of

¹³⁷ Interview with Betty Wein, Morality in the Media, 12-20-90.

¹³⁸ Interview with Bernard Yoh, Accuracy in the Media, 12-11-90.

¹³⁹ Interview with Christopher Finan, Americans For Constitutional Freedom, 12-11-90.

¹⁴⁰ Interview with Betty Wein, Morality in the Media, 12-20-90.

Wildmons and his approach to advertisers:

This is what freedom is all about. On one side you have freedom of expression, you can express anything you want, the others who object to it, they can raise point pressures, against certain things, in the end it's up to the people to decide what they want and don't want. Suppose a program is sponsored by a chocolate company and then somebody objects to a certain program, because they think it is immoral or unpatriotic or whatever and then they ask certain people to stop buying chocolate and if people will stop buying it, it means that the group has a certain amount of support. That's their expression, their First Amendment right.¹⁴¹

Christopher Finan said that his group does not try to influence television as does Wildmon's group. In his opinion, the Rev. Donald Wildmon is enjoying success without the public's knowledge. "That Reverend Donald Wildmon is continuing to enjoy successes like the Burger King folding up under the threat of a boycott is an example on how potent the strategy is by the Reverend Donald Wildmon."¹⁴²

Allen Wildmon explained how the Burger King episode- in thier eyes a big victory against the networks, proves they are a powerful group in the 1990's:

Burger King was notified three times that they were a prime candidate for a boycott. They ignored us. (Grand Metropolitan is the parent company of Burger King) Burger King was chosen and the boycott was announced. The first reaction was this is a small extremist group, ignore them. When they started getting literally thousands of phone calls and letters from all over the nation, they (Grand Metropolitan) contacted us. That was

¹⁴¹ Interview with Bernard Yoh, Accuracy in the Media, 12-11-90.

¹⁴² Interview with Christopher Finan, Americans for Constitutional Freedom, 12-11-90.

three weeks into the boycott.¹⁴³

Allen Wildmon said that Burger King agreed to change its advertising policy after AFA members promised that Burger King wouldn't be on their hit list of top ten sponsors of offensive programming.

He explained the deal with Burger King, which according to Allen, they will not admit publicly. "A part of that agreement was to spend, well let me put it to you this way, literally hundreds of thousands of dollars to run a half page ad in all daily newspapers around the nation, which they did," said Wildmon.¹⁴⁴

Wildmon said Grand Metropolitan hired an ad agency in New York to preview those programs in which their ads appeared before their airing on network television. "So the boycott was called off and incidentally they didn't show up in the top ten or twenty as far as I know," said Wildmon.¹⁴⁵

If AFA has had successes against major advertisers, why wouldn't those advertisers ever admit to it publicly?

Well you've got the other people on the other side (liberal, left-wing, materialistic) that believe differently as opposed to the conservative point of view and they don't want to offend or lose those customers. I don't know of any major company that we've been successful against, has said yes we were wrong, we did wrong. They are just not going to do it.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ Interview with Allen Wildmon, American Family Association, 1-18-91.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

Wildmon said advertisers get on this list of offensive network program sponsors by means of the AFA monitoring process which uses a reported 3,000 volunteers from all over the country.

They monitor the same programs from all over the nation. Then they send the information to us on the amount of sex, violence, profanity and the stereotyping of Christians on television programs. From that information we (AFA) put together the ten most offensive advertisers in these categories. We look for incidents not specific programs. The program might be clean tonight and then tomorrow night they have sex and violence.¹⁴⁷

Wildmon said that the current list of offensive advertisers were selected after their most recent monitoring period from October 28th to November 4th, 1990.¹⁴⁸ Wildmon listed them from number one (which is the most offensive) to number ten: "American Honda, SC Johnson and Sons, Duracell USA, US Sprint, SONY Corporation of America, Anheuser Busch, Pfizer, Nissan Motors, HJ Heinz and Chrysler Corporation."¹⁴⁹

Allen Wildmon admitted there have been companies that have ignored requests of AFA to meet with them and talk about the sponsoring of offensive material.

"Last year, Mennen ignored us for a year, although we had reports from people that they had to shut down their factory for two weeks, because their product was backing up in the warehouse. So Mennen didn't meet with us," said

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

Wildmon.¹⁵⁰

So what happens when such advertisers decide not to meet with the AFA? "Those who don't agree to make some changes, will be selected for a one year boycott."¹⁵¹

Wildmon said there are still boycotts against companies that have decided to follow the path of Mennen. "7-Eleven has lasted over two years, Holiday Inn has been going on for five years and K-Mart and Waldenbooks has been going on for one year and four months."¹⁵²

AFA does not only boycott advertisers, according to sources and other advocacy groups, but has been successful in changing and even cancelling network programs.

Brian Sullivan of NCTV says his group networked with AFA in getting two shows off the air in 1990.

One issue we had in common with AFA is the amount of glamorized violence on television, specifically with two television shows "Friday the 13th" and "Freddy's Nightmares". These were two horror shows targeted at children and remain, although cancelled, the worst shows ever produced for television.¹⁵³

Sullivan said that NCTV decided to take an active role in boycotting the advertisers of these two shows

We first informed them that they were indeed advertising on those shows. At least 30 to 40 percent of those advertisers after being notified of that fact, then decided on their own to drop advertising dollars from the show. Then another

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Interview with Brian Sullivan, National Coalition against Television Violence, 12-11-90.

big percentage of advertisers dropped after they were told what kind of content appeared on those shows. After our two phases 80 percent of the advertisers on those shows had dropped, after we had spoken to them and wrote to them. This forced the shows to be cancelled due to financial concerns.¹⁵⁴

Sullivan said his group considered that a success.¹⁵⁵

The AFA also claimed to have successes in the deletion and cancellation of network programming. Wildmon elaborated:

We got the "Garbage Pail Kids" on CBS, "Scandals 2" and "Crimes of Passion 2" both on ABC were cancelled even before they were ever aired. Also we got three and a half seconds removed from a "Mighty Mouse" cartoon on CBS because it clearly showed Mighty Mouse snorting cocaine (the producer of the show says that Mighty Mouse was doing nothing more than sniffing a flower).¹⁵⁶

Wildmon argued that not only did the AFA get the Vice-President of Children's programming on CBS fired, but it also cost ABC and NBC large amounts of money due to advertiser pullout from shows.

After the "Mighty Mouse" episode, Ralston Purina and Mounds Candy Company wrote two of the most blistering letters we have ever seen to the President of CBS. After that happened George Tzart (V.P.) was fired. CBS said that the reason for the firing was because he was about to retire. Again, this is typical of most major corporations. As for the loss of advertising dollars, the LA Times reported on the 18th of December (1990) that ABC lost 1.5 million on a "Thirtysomething" episode (this episode was about two homosexuals in bed together) and NBC also lost about 1.5 million after a "Lifestories" episode promoting

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Interview with Allen Wildmon, American Family Association, 1-18-91.

homosexuals.¹⁵⁷

Wildmon insisted that AFA is credited with the pullout of several major advertisers from shows depicting homosexuals. Allen quoted the LA Times from the 22nd of December saying that his group indeed influences advertisers. "One reason advertisers have been withdrawing from such shows is that the Reverend Donald Wildmon has threatened to boycott companies that portray the gay lifestyle as normal and acceptable."¹⁵⁸

Christopher Finan said that his group opposes such tactics when it comes to the public. "It is the right of the networks to establish programming in terms of the potential appeal to the American public, rather than the fear of pressure from a well organized minority."¹⁵⁹

However, responded Wildmon, his organization is far from being a well organized minority. "Four hundred and twenty-five thousand people get our magazine, this includes 178,000 churches that cross all denominational lines and we also have direct mail. All in all, I would say that we reach literally millions of people."¹⁶⁰

Meanwhile, Bernard Yoh agreed that the Reverend Donald Wildmon has a right to attempt to force the cancellation of television shows. "What he is trying to do is to make the

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Interview with Christopher Finan, 12-11-90.

¹⁶⁰ Interview with Allen Wildmon, American Family Association, 1-18-91.

media uphold a more moral standard that his followers are interested in."¹⁶¹ Betty Wein of Morality in the Media also agreed. "It is as American as apple pie."¹⁶²

¹⁶¹ Interview with Bernard Yoh, Accuracy in the Media, 12-11-90.

¹⁶² Interview with Betty Wein, Morality in the Media, 12-20-90.

CHAPTER IV

ADVERTISERS AND THE NETWORKS

In early December 1990, Rev. Donald Wildmon announced a list of top ten advertisers who sponsored what he considered offensive material on television. Wildmon then announced that one of the companies would be targeted for a boycott by early February 1991. His top ten list included American Honda, Duracell U.S.A., HJ Heinz, Pfizer Inc., SC Johnson and Sons, SONY Corporation of America, U.S. Sprint, Nissan Motor Company of America, Anheuser Busch, and Chrysler.¹⁶³ On February 15, 1991 the boycott was launched against Nissan Motor Corporation of America.¹⁶⁴

All ten companies were contacted by phone and asked a series of questions dealing with their advertising policies. They were asked about AFA and what they thought of a possible boycott against their companies. Nine of the ten companies replied. Only Duracell U.S.A. refused comment.

Many of the companies claimed to have no knowledge of the possible boycott or the AFA. Two of the companies said they did not even know they were on the list to be boycotted. Several more said that neither Wildmon nor any

¹⁶³ Interview with Allen Wildmon, 1-18-91.

¹⁶⁴ Interview with Steve Spurgen 2/15/91, Nissan Motor Corp. of America.

of his staff had contacted them. However, Allen Wildmon said that he had spoken to all the companies on the list.¹⁶⁵

The Hit List

"I would love to know if one of our competitors made the list, because one of our competitors does ten times of the amount of advertising we do and if we made number four (on the hit list) then they should be number one," said Jaclyn McLain of U.S. Sprint.¹⁶⁶

Chuck Lanphear, Media Director of HJ Heinz, said he was aware that his company is on the list, but is surprised because of its policies. "We do not advertise on any shows that have gratuitous sex, violence, profanity, or the making fun of Christians," said Lanphear.¹⁶⁷ Coby Low, media assistant at Rubin Postear Associates (responsible for all advertising for American Honda Corp.) said they are trying to get a copy of the study and the list. "We have heard that news programming, and sports were included, but until we get a copy to see how it was done, it is hard to comment on that matter."¹⁶⁸

Others have commented on the matter including John Brown (a pseudonym) at SONY Corporation of America. "I will

¹⁶⁵ Interview with Allen Wildmon, American Family Association, 1-18-91.

¹⁶⁶ Interview with Jaclyn McLain 1/27/91, of U.S. Sprint.

¹⁶⁷ Interview with Chuck Lanphear, 1-29-91, Media Director of HJ Heinz.

¹⁶⁸ Interview with Coby Low, media assistant at Rubin Postear and Associates, 1-27-91.

tell you why that has occurred. It seems that there was a 30 second commercial that was a no-charge commercial was put into "Lifestories" and it was on Aids, which was very tastefully handled."¹⁶⁹ Brown added that the episode did not condone homosexuality, but this is why SONY is on the list.

Steve Spurgen said that even though Nissan has been boycotted by the AFA it will not change its policies dealing with television.

Our policies are based on what we believe our standards are and should be. It is unfortunate that we can't, we would like to, because that particular group and other groups like them have specialized interests, and this is one of them. This particular group has not provided any kind of specifics so it is really hard to respond because in our vague generality of sex, violence, that could be the evening news.¹⁷⁰

Spurgen said they did not know when the AFA decided to boycott Nissan, because it gave Nissan no specific information on the issue. "They just told us that we were a dirty company, with no specifics about that, even after we requested that. So you are going to have to assume that they operate by their own motivation," said Spurgen.¹⁷¹

David White of Anheuser Busch said the list does not surprise him, because Anheuser Busch is a manufacturer of alcohol beverages. "I would like to say that, historically, companies that produce those products are always under fire.

¹⁶⁹ Source (asked that his name not be used for the study) at SONY Corporation of America, 1-27-91, he is given a false name (John Brown) to protect himself at the company.

¹⁷⁰ Interview with Steve Spurgen, Nissan Motor Company of America, 2-15-91.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

We take the heat for a lot of silly things, so it doesn't surprise me," said White.¹⁷²

White said Anheuser Busch is concerned with the shows on which its ads appear on:

We want to stress the image of a good time, and a healthy lifestyle, but you have to go back to the point that a lot of people think that "David Letterman" show is off-color. That is a judgmental call, we think it is a very fine program.¹⁷³

We try to buy time on television programs that are generally accepted as wholesome entertainment, but we realize that personal values and standards vary widely and there is always the possibility that we may offend somebody such as the Rev. Donald Wildmon, but we go on television because it is the medium that is going to reach the largest group of potential consumers.¹⁷⁴

Spurgen said that his company tries to support shows that will reach the largest number of people who will buy Nissan's products, but he said that quality is also important.

There are a lot of shows we turned down because we don't believe the quality is at the level that we want to be associated with. So we do it more on a quality level rather than on actual subject matter. For example, a program on rape that shows it in a glorified manner or in a positive manner we wouldn't be associated with that. However, a program that deals with the subject very sensitively, actually helps educate people on how to safeguard against rape or how to have the strength to prosecute after the fact, we would sponsor. So to say that we don't advertise on

¹⁷² Interview with David White 2-5-91, of Fleischman Hillard, responsible for all Bud Light advertising (Anheuser Busch).

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Interview with Jeanette Lettliter 1-27-91, SC Johnsons and Sons.

shows that deal with rape doesn't quite cover it.¹⁷⁵

Mary Suchara, advertising specialist at Chrylser, said that if there were a problem with programming, an advertising manager will decide on one of three possible solutions.

1. Pull out of the program
2. Remain on the Show
3. Move the commercial to a different segment of the show¹⁷⁶

Coby Low said that American Honda wants to put its advertisements in programs with a positive environment.

Advertising Industry Services screen all our programs before the ads run, and if something that is disturbing or has excessive violence or sex is brought to our attention then we will decide if we want to stay on the program or not. An example would be "LA Law". There are certain episodes that are fine, and other episodes that might show sex or something else that we don't find appropriate, so it is a judgmental thing.¹⁷⁷

U.S. Sprint's McLain said that the company tries to be a conscientious advertiser and would remove sponsorship on any shows of questionable material (whether it would be violence, sex or a controversial topic).¹⁷⁸ SONY Corporation of America said that it wants to present a family image. "We don't like controversial material, but by the same token something about Detroit appeared on "60 Minutes" and we got letters from people in Detroit who didn't like that and were

¹⁷⁵ Interview with Steve Spurgen, Nissan Motor Company of America, 2-15-91.

¹⁷⁶ Letter from Mary Suchara, Advertising Specialist at Chrysler Corporation, 3-6-91.

¹⁷⁷ Interview with Coby Low, Rubin Postear and Associates, 1-27-91.

¹⁷⁸ Interview with Jaclyn McLain, 1-27-91.

mad at us," said John Brown.¹⁷⁹

Brown said that SONY will stay out of a popular show until it believes that the show is not detrimental to its image. "We stayed out of Arsenio Hall until we were sure that his show was decent," said Brown.¹⁸⁰

Procter & Gamble, who in 1981 removed advertising on 50 programs after speaking with Wildmon, has a very strict stance on television programs.

Our policy specifically prohibits sponsoring programs we consider objectionable or undesirable because of excessive sex or gratuitous violence, sex or profanity, or because of their controversial nature. This policy is followed without consideration of the economic consequences it may have on our advertising efficiency.¹⁸¹

Mary Suchara said that Chrysler makes every effort to advertise on quality television programs. Because Chrysler wants to reach its target audience while providing a positive environment for its messages, but she added that everyone in the public has an opinion on programming.¹⁸²

"What may be questionable to one viewer may not be acceptable to another," said Suchara.¹⁸³ She added that the company avoids controversial programming at all costs.¹⁸⁴

¹⁷⁹ Interview with source at SONY, 1-27-91.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Letter from Karen Lubbers, Customer Services at Procter & Gamble, 2-5-91.

¹⁸² Letter from Mary Suchara, advertising specialist at Chrysler, 3-6-91.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

Concerns About AFA

"Wildmon is off the wall when it comes to some stuff, I mean remember that this is the same fish symbol, but it used to say NFD," said Brown.¹⁸⁵ "When I was at Grand Metropolitan (owners of Burger King) he (Wildmon) wanted to pick us as the national pornographer of the month. They picked RJ Reynolds at the time, but our English owners said 'Oh, we damn wish jolly well that we would have be picked,'" said Brown.¹⁸⁶

Jaclyn McLain said that she does not agree with what Wildmon's group says about U.S. Sprint, but when it removed sponsorship from "Geraldo", U.S. Sprint did receive lots of thank-you letters. "We try to be very aware of what our commercials are being aired on. It has obviously become more of an issue with consumers, which I guess you don't think about it until you receive lots of letters," said McLain.¹⁸⁷

McLain said she could never stomach sitting in front of the show (Geraldo) to keep up with who advertises on it, but disagrees with opinions on the issues. "I know that we don't have any information on what they consider immoral, but what's immoral to me might not be immoral to you," said McLain.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁵ Interview with Source at SONY, 1-27-91.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Interview with Jaclyn McLain, U.S. Sprint, 1-27-91.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

Outside Concerns

Steve Spurgen said there are outside concerns that influence their advertising. For instance, Spurgen said Nissan belongs to an affiliate group called Tread Lightly which gets people who manufacture trucks, cars, four-wheel drives to be more responsible about the environment.

We don't want to do anything in our advertising that would encourage people to use vehicles irresponsibly. I think that almost any corporation that you talk to is going to come back to the word responsibility. We certainly try to show that vehicles used are done in a responsive manner. So there are factors, if something is sensitive we wouldn't want to be in it. Hypothetically, if we had some shown an advertisement with cars across the Golden Gate Bridge, I doubt we would have shown it after the Earthquake.¹⁸⁹

David White concurred with that point!

We have a spot that takes place in the desert, fortunately in went out of rotation the first of the year, and when it comes back into the rotation it will be reviewed simply because of the sensitivities.¹⁹⁰

Low said shows dealing with the Persian Gulf or child abuse would concern them. "Even though it may have a very positive message, we don't think that people are receptive to our advertising, compared to a show that might be less serious or little bit more lighthearted," she said.¹⁹¹

Letters From the Public and Advocacy Groups

"We hand them over to our consumer affairs department,

¹⁸⁹ Interview with Steve Spurgen, Nissan Motor Company of America, 2-15-91.

¹⁹⁰ Interview with David White, Anheuser Busch, 2-5-91.

¹⁹¹ Interview with Coby Low, Rubin Postear and Associates, 1-27-91.

when an individual writes to us, then we write back. With the Moral Majority or the AFA that is sent on to our public relations department," said Jeanette Lettliter.¹⁹² Chuck Lanphear said they get letters all the time from consumers, but it is hard to tell exactly where they come from. He said that when they do get the letters they go to their consumer affairs department.¹⁹³

Coby Low said, however, it depends on the program or episode.

If it mentions a specific episode we will take a look at it. If it is a program in general, it is very hard to do any research on it, unless people are very specific. Broad accusations are very hard to track down.¹⁹⁴

David White said that because of Anheuser Busch's policy he answers every letter personally.

They come in bags full, I do Bud Light and respond to every letter that comes into us. We want to be a responsive company and they take consumer suggestions, complaints, and just general comments very seriously. The letters run the spectrum. I get a lot of pictures of horses drinking Bud Light, a lot of compliments, but complaints make up less than a quarter of the letters. Generally from people disagreeing with the tone of our ads. I had one lady who was concerned about the portrayal of women on one of our ads call me. She believed that this would lead to battered women and rape. I mean I can't argue with people like that, so you have to be very nice and take their comments.¹⁹⁵

Other advertisers said that when they get letters from

¹⁹² Interview with Jeanette Lettliter, SC Johnsons and Sons, 1-27-91.

¹⁹³ Interview with Chuck Lanphear, HJ Heinz, 1-29-91.

¹⁹⁴ Interview with Coby Low, Rubin Postear and Associates, 1-27-91.

¹⁹⁵ Interview with David White, Anheuser Busch, 2-5-91.

individuals they go to the consumer affairs line. Spurgen said, however, that if a letter comes from an organized group Nissan's response is different.

"If it is an organized group we always try to ask them what the specifics are from the complaints and what the objections are. Because you can't deal with something unless you know what it is and how many people it affects," said Spurgen.¹⁹⁶

Spurgen said that it goes back to reaching the maximum number of people possible with your message. "Consequently, any kind of comment that comes to us we want to deal with in a responsible sort of way, if it is a responsible objection," said Spurgen.¹⁹⁷ When asked what happens if Nissan gets a letter from an individual every week Spurgern responded, "Then we assume that the person is buying a Toyota," said Spurgen.¹⁹⁸

Advertiser Thoughts

"I don't know why he is climbing all over prime, he ought to climb all over those people in daytime," said Brown.¹⁹⁹ Brown said that people should ask the AFA how many of them watch daytime television. "It would be a great shock to them to watch daytime television. I mean if you

¹⁹⁶ Interview with Steve Spurgen, Nissan Motor Company of America, 2-15-91.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Interview with Source at SONY, 1-27-91.

ever had the opportunity to review daytime, then you would see more sex than on nighttime television," said Brown.²⁰⁰

Brown's opinion of the Rev. Wildmon and his organization, the AFA is that

He's not a loony; he is a blackmailer and an opportunist. If you see his letterhead he's got the Bishop Teller, one of the far out guys, he wants to talk about you know, crazies out there.²⁰¹

Brown said that Wildmon has been blackmailing for years and now is back doing it over again. Brown said there is some fear among the companies when dealing with the AFA. "Some people don't like controversy, particularly when you have some management from Tokyo who are here, and they get sensitive enough about Japan bashing," said Brown.²⁰²

The Networks

The AfA has claimed victory over CBS after the "Mighty Mouse" episode (see chapter Three). Furthermore, the organization claims to have had success in the cancellation of a cartoon by CBS entitled the "Garbage Pail Kids". However, Beth Bressan, Vice President in charge of programming policy for both coasts, said that it was an internal management decision and not pressure from the AFA. "They take credit that is not deserved. "Mighty Mouse" was aired two times before without negative comment, then on the third airing they claimed drug use, it is just plain

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Ibid.

nonsense," said Bressan.²⁰³

According to Bressan, Ralph Basheki (creator of Mighty Mouse) offered of his own accord to cut out the scene.

It showed Mighty Mouse upset over his girlfriend Polly crushing some wilted flowers and the lines showed them going into his nose, just like the circles you see from smoke going into his nose. It was his decision and we stand by him.²⁰⁴

Bressan said that the pressure groups try to take credit for the episode and claim victory, which she said is not true. "They take a lot of credit for things that they had nothing to do with," said Bressan.²⁰⁵

Everyone after the fact claimed victory. As for the "Garbage Pail Kids" because animation is so expensive we decided to not air it, but once again they all claimed victory saying that because they sent a few letters, that forced us to cancel the show, that is just plain nonsense.²⁰⁶

Bressan said that CBS gives very little credence to the pressure groups. "Often it is something that hasn't even aired yet, and already they are complaining about it, they haven't even seen it. The letters are usually form letters. It is this practice that has no credibility with us," said Bressan.²⁰⁷

Bressan said that they get between 500,000 and 600,000 letters from individuals a year. "These letters we care

²⁰³ Interview with Beth Bressan, Vice President of CBS, in charge of programming policy for both the East and West coasts, 2/25/91.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

about, not the ones that are from these advocacy groups," said Bressan.²⁰⁸

Bressan said there have been very few instances of threats and attempted boycotts which do not have an impact on the advertisers. "Advertisers want to find the best appropriate medium to air their ads. Terry Rakolta got Coca-Cola and a few other advertisers to pull-out of "Married With Children", but later they went right back in."²⁰⁹ Bressan said that most of the boycotts and threats have not been successful Jane Paley, Director of Community Relations at ABC agrees.

"There has never been an advertiser boycott that I recall that influenced programming," said Paley.²¹⁰ Paley said there were threats of it years ago, but not recently. What it comes down to, she said, is that Americans want to choose their programs on television.

I think that many people, just individual viewers, are as offended by the idea that special interest groups would want to legislate what is appropriate television viewing. I mean the American public wants choice, that's what we are based on, the principles of free choice.²¹¹

Bressan said that the majority of Americans knows that these groups represent a very small number of people; in addition, they have very little knowledge on whom and what

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Interview with Jane Paley, Director of Community Relations for ABC, 3-4-91.

²¹¹ Ibid.

they are boycotting. "The boycotts have not been successful, because they don't know what is going on," said Beth Bressan.²¹²

Mike Vrabec, Sales Manager of Channel 2 in Tulsa, said that he does not know of any boycotts against his station, but he believes that there are two reasons for possible advertiser pullout.

1. Reaction to the content depending on the pressure exerted upon them by their consumers or customers.

2. The negative press a particular program carried with it.²¹³

Vrabec said KJRH has had advertisers who would not be in "Saturday Night Live" because of the talent, host or the content of the show.²¹⁴ In Addition, Vrabec said there are some shows that advertisers generally stay away from. "Talk show programs, although not traditionally, will have topics that are less than desirable," said Vrabec and "tabloid programs and sensational shows also have had advertisers remove sponsorship."²¹⁵

We received the Telerep report (a company that listed the number of advertisers to remove from syndicated and network programs) and it showed that "America's" Most Wanted, A Current Affair, Divorce Court, and "Married With Children" had the most advertisers remove sponsorship.²¹⁶

²¹² Interview with Beth Bressan, CBS, 2-25-91.

²¹³ Interview with Mike Vrabec, Sales Manager of KJRC-Channel 2 in Tulsa, Oklahoma, an affiliate of NBC, 2-26-91.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

Vrabec said that if there is likely to be a problem with a certain program, Channel 2 will either warn the viewer ahead of time or pre-empt the show.

The only program we pre-empted was a "Donahue" program that featured 2 Live Crew. The reason we did it is because there was some foul language that we didn't think was appropriate at 3 p.m.. We did air it and a later time in the evening, but we do like to keep an eye on things like that.²¹⁷

Vrabec said that after not deciding to air the show at its original time they did receive phone calls, both pro and con. "There were a number that were positive and supportive and thought that was an excellent (that we did not air the show at its original time) and then we got negative calls suggesting censorship," said Mike.²¹⁸

Vrabec said that when people claim that the station is using censorship when a program is removed incorrect.

You have to use your judgement on what you think is appropriate for the multitude of your audience. It sometimes is sensitive and is going to offend some people, but one thing we have learned in our business, is that your not going to keep everyone happy all the time.²¹⁹

Jane Paley agreed that difference of opinion is a reality in the business. "What some people regard as humor, others are offended. How are you going to determine what is generally funny? Ultimately, it is a very subjective thing," said Paley.²²⁰

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Interview with Jane Paley, Director of Community Relations at ABC, 3-4-91.

Paley cannot ever recall something ABC aired that was generally offensive. "There are always going to be, especially in the area of sitcoms, shows with meaning and there are always going to be those that are sensitive about these shows," said Jane Paley.²²¹

However, Paley said that most people don't want to be told by an advocacy group that the show is unsuitable for viewing.

This has been proven by FOX which is doing really breakthrough kinds of things. It is youth-oriented and it is what young people want to watch and whether you like it or not is irrelevant. Whether a pressure group approves of it or not is also irrelevant.²²²

Vrabec also believes that FOX has proven that there are some things people want to watch on television, that others would find offensive. "They have probably pushed the limits (of decency) more than anybody. That's been something that has really helped them get established with the 18-34 year olds."²²³

Both FOX and NBC refused to discuss their policies on advocacy groups and on advertisers removing sponsorship from their networks.

Reactions From the Networks

Beth Bressan of CBS said that she thinks that the AFA

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Interview with Mike Vrabec, Sales Manager at Channel 2 in Tulsa an NBC affiliate, 2-26-91.

is a farce and should not be considered a serious threat to the industry.

Gene Mater, my predecessor, found out that the Rev. Wildmon's monitoring system was a sham. When Wildmon found out, then he had to do something about it, so he had to get a monitoring system. I mean he kept claiming to have this system, when in fact he didn't have one.²²⁴

"They elicit money for their own coffers, they try to get involved in decision making, and they will take credit for it if something happens. I mean they make this premise that they work very hard, which is just ludicrous," said Bressan.²²⁵

²²⁴ Interview with Beth Bressan, CBS, 2-25-91.

²²⁵ Ibid.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Summary

Open Letter that appeared in the major dailies in the U.S. from Burger King, from the Tulsa World 11-4-90.

An Open Letter To The American People.

Burger King wishes to go on record as supporting traditional American values on television, especially the importance of the family.

We believe the American people desire television programs that reflect the values they are trying to instill in their children.

We pledge to support such programs with our advertising dollars.

BURGER KING CORPORATION

In 1991, Burger King published an ad apologizing to the American public for sponsoring offensive programming after the AFA promised that Burger King would never appear in its list of offensive advertisers. In spite of the Burger King capitulation, there is no proof that advocacy groups do, in fact, influence advertisers or the networks.

They may, though, have some influence on a limited level. Furthermore, while some groups may claim to have succeed in influencing the advertisers and the networks, others claim that external variables cause advertisers to remove sponsorship, or the networks to change programming.

Conclusions

This study was conducted to see if advocacy groups, mainly the AFA, have influenced advertisers to remove sponsorship from network programming. The study also investigated whether these groups have influenced programming policies of the networks.

Based on evidence gained in interviews from the advocacy groups, advertisers, and the networks, it would seem that these advocacy groups have little direct influence on the advertisers or the networks. However these interviews indicate there is some small influence with regard to formulating advertising policy and network policy. According to the interviews, advocacy groups appear to have a small influence on the advertisers.

There is no evidence that these groups and the AFA has any direct influence on network programming.

Based on the testimonials of advertising executives and personnel, there appears to be some fear of the advocacy groups. Advertisers leery of offending their consumers may remove sponsorship from certain shows.

Because there will always be advertisers who are willing to appear in a show, regardless of its content, the advocacy groups have limited power.

Significant points can be made from interviews on advocacy groups. Left-wing advocacy groups, agreed that the AFA does influence (to a degree) advertisers. These groups tend to believe that any group using tactics of letter

writing, boycotts, and protests, are blackmailers and censors.

Meanwhile, groups on the right hold that it is their constitutional right to complain to and boycott those people who advertise on shows that they find offensive. Both groups, on the left and right, tend to agree that everyone has a First Amendment right to contact advertisers and the networks.

However, groups on the left believe that the AFA and other groups on the right, abuse the First Amendment. All groups believe that the networks are not doing enough for the quality of programming on television.

Some right-wing groups, admitted that they contacted advertisers that they felt sponsored offensive programming. The National Coalition against Television Violence (claims to be the middle on political agenda) had admitted that it had contacted advertisers to remove sponsorship from programs it found offensive.

While some groups will not actually boycott advertisers, a threat of possible boycott, appears, in some cases, to work.

Some advertisers acknowledged that these groups do have some ability to organize a protest and to boycott advertisers. However, this study does not find that the AFA or any other group can actually influence the advertisers to remove sponsorship.

Because of the sensitivity of this issue, many advertisers have refused to comment on the AFA. If these

groups are not affecting their policy, why would they refuse comment? Advertisers who did comment said that these groups, particularly the AFA, are well-organized.

There does, however, seem to be a connection between mass letter writing campaigns to advertisers and advertisers changing their policies toward television. More information is needed to find out if this activity leads to boycotts.

While the advocacy groups claim success, almost no one (with the exception of Procter & Gamble, Domino's Pizza, and SONY Corp. of America) in the advertising field agree that it is solely the pressure from advocacy groups which lead to change advertiser's policies. Some advertisers changed their policy on their own, others, however, did not change their policies. Therefore, there is no direct link that the AFA and other groups leads further to advertiser withdrawal or to change in television programming policy.

The networks responding to this study appear to show no concern for these groups. The networks are more responsive to letters they receive from the public as individuals. Both networks said that advocacy groups do not influence programming, nor do they influence advertiser pullout of shows. Both networks said that advocacy groups do not influence programming, nor do they influence advertiser pullout of shows.

Both said that they knew of no successful boycott against the advertisers. The networks agree that it is up to the general public to watch a show and if they don't like it then change the channel.

Recommendations

More research is needed to see exactly how much influence the AFA and other advocacy groups have on advertisers. Research is needed that can be conducted as a combination of qualitative and quantitative analysis. As an example of a qualitative approach, a researcher might work inside an ad agency to observe its policy for television. The researcher then would have access to information on how pressure groups actually influences advertisers.

More research needs to be conducted on whether the public would support a boycott of companies who material some find offensive. The results could be sent to the top fifty companies for their responses. (However, because of lack of trust on the part of the companies the latter study probably would not be that effective.)

More research is needed on people's attitudes towards sex, violence, and profanity on television.

Focus groups consisting of advertisers, network officials, and the public could suggest solutions to programming policies of the networks. This type of study could help the advertisers in finding a workable response to their sponsorship of programming.

Because there are many intervening variables which enter into making television policy on the part of the advertisers and networks, it is difficult to accurately gauge the influence of advocacy groups on them.

This study only focused on advocacy groups and their

efforts to pressure advertisers and the networks. Network television, for the moment, is here to stay in society. There will always be people who find some material offensive to them, and others who want more sex and profanity on television. Some people want the networks to compete with cable.

Cable, in some cases, forces the networks to show more material that people find offensive. Competition and economic survival are the realities of television. To compete, someone will have to take risks, and, regardless of public opinion, continue to offend some viewers (FOX appears to be in this category). There are no winners or losers in this type of environment. There will always be those who approve of advertiser sponsorship and network programming.

Advocacy groups will continue to use measures others find extreme, to pressure the advertisers and the networks into changing their policies.

Society is constantly changing its opinion on topics of sex, violence and profanity. What some people dislike about television in 1991 could change in 1992. Furthermore, what people like about television could also change. Television programming is in a process of constant evolution with no correct answers. As long as society changes, television will also change; for good or for bad, that is how society works.

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PERSONAL INTERVIEWS

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Sullivan, Brian, National Coalition Against Television
Violence, 12-11-90.

Swanson, Dorthy, President of Viewers for Quality Television,
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Wein, Betty, Morality in the Media, 12-20-90.

Wildmon, Allen, Director of Public Relations for the American
Family Association, 9-17-90 and 1-18-91.

Yoh, Bernard, Director of Communications for Accuracy in
Media, 12-11-90.

Pamphlet and Interview with National Coalition Against
Censorship, 12-11-90 and 12-17-90.

Action for Children's Television interviewed on 12-13-90 and
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Lanphear, Chuck, Media Director for HJ Heinz, 1-29-91.

Lettliter, Jeanette, SC Johnsons and Sons, 1-27-91.

Low, Coby, Advertising Assistant at Rubin Postaer Associates,
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McLain Jaclyn, U.S. Sprint, 1-27-91.

Ortez, Nancy, Director of Ad Services, Pfizer, Inc. 1-27-91.

Spurgen, Steve, Corporate Communications of Nissan Motor
Corporation of America, 2-15-91.

Suchara, Mary, Letter from Chrysler, Advertising Specialist
at Chrysler, 3-6-91.

White, David, handles all Bud Light advertising at Fleischman
Hillard, 2-5-91.

Source at SONY Corporation of America, 1-27-91.

Pamphlet and letter from Karen Lubbers of Procter & Gamble,
2-5-91.

Duracell U.S.A. 1-27-91, 2-1-91 (declined comment).

Bressan, Beth, CBS, Vice President of Programming Policy for
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Paley, Jane, ABC, Director of Community Relations, 3-4-91.

Vrabec, Mike, Channel 2 in Tulsa, 2-25-91, NBC Affiliate.

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