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Break Free: Building a Critique of Social Marketing Theory

Michael Dolenko

A Thesis

in

The Department

of

Communication Studies

Presented in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts at
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ABSTRACT

Break Free: Building a Critique of Social Marketing

Michael Dolenko

This study develops a critique of approaches to persuasive social change known as social marketing. The focus is on social marketing's theoretical underpinnings of social change, motivation and media effects, and how these influence the development and implementation of social change communications campaigns. The work critically examines various assumptions present in social marketing writing, including: the idea of social change as a modernist, teleological process; the notion of human behaviour as rationally motivated; the view that consumer products serve only immediate material and psychological needs; and, the conception of communication as a linear process in which media audiences are passive recipients of information that generates predictable cognitive, attitudinal and behavioural effects. To show how theoretical shortcomings influence practice, elements of Health Canada's social marketing campaigns are examined. Theories of motivation and communication with psychological, "culturalist" and anthropological roots are presented as potential alternatives for reforming social marketing theories. The study concludes with an analysis of the institutional settings of Health Canada's social marketing campaigns. This analysis suggests that a complex of administrative factors can help explain the prominence of social marketing approaches to social problems, while simultaneously accounting for some key limitations of the practice.

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Introduction

Public campaigns intended to influence the attitudes and behaviour of society have existed in Western society since at least ancient Greece, when certain segments of society launched movements to free slaves. Since then, public communication campaigns have arisen to support a wide range of movements: from the expansion of suffrage to prohibition and the prevention of sexual abuse and harassment. In the latter-half of the 20th century, sociologists have termed the use of mass mediated communications designed to alter public attitudes and behaviour “public communication campaigns.” Unlike two other widespread forms of mediated persuasive communications – commercial communications, which are designed to influence consumers to purchase goods and services, and political campaigns intended to affect voting behaviour – public communications campaigns are intended to alter social knowledge, attitude and behaviour outside these realms.

In Canada, one of the highest-profile and longest running campaigns has been the federal government’s anti-tobacco efforts which began in the 1960s. Early campaigns which focused on disseminating information on the health hazards of smoking seem to have had success: between 1965 and 1986 the proportion of Canadians aged 15 and over who smoked dropped from 49.5% to 33% (Health and Welfare Canada, 1992b, 16). With mounting scientific evidence on the health hazards of smoking, an ageing population placing increasing demands on the nation’s health care system, and an escalating national debt, the Canadian government renewed its anti-smoking efforts in the late 1980s. In 1988, the federal government passed the Tobacco Products Control Act which banned all

advertising of tobacco products in Canada. Around the same time, Health Canada¹ adopted an approach to public communications campaigns known as social marketing (Health and Welfare Canada, 1993).

Briefly, social marketing is the application of commercial marketing principles to non-commercial spheres. Commercial marketing is classically formulated around four elements: product, price, promotion and place (or the four “Ps” of marketing texts). Social marketing brings these elements to bear on public communications campaigns and adopts commercial marketing’s business management techniques. In 1988, Jim Mintz, then Chief of the Marketing and Communications Unit at Health and Welfare Canada, wrote in the department’s Health Promotion magazine that “social marketing can be a highly effective means of supporting major initiatives in the health area.” (Mintz, 1992, 28). Since then, social marketing has dominated the federal government’s fight against smoking and has consumed a budget of more than \$1 million each year. However, statistical evidence suggests that recent efforts to reduce the incidence of smoking have had little effect on behaviour. A 1994 Statistics Canada, study, for example, found that the proportion of smokers among 15-19 year olds, one of Health Canada’s key target groups, actually rose marginally to 24% in 1994 from 21% in 1990 (quoted in Champion, 1996, 31). At the very least, the data show the incidence of smoking is decreasing at a much slower rate than it did in the 1970s and early 1980s. This is despite the fact that Canadians, including teenagers,

¹ In 1987, the department was called Health and Welfare Canada. In 1993, it became Health Canada when the department’s responsibility for social and income programs were moved to the Human Resources Development Canada. For stylistic consistency, the name Health Canada is used throughout this thesis.

are highly cognizant of smoking's dangers: 90% of Canadians between 10 and 19 know that tobacco is harmful to health and 91% know it causes lung cancer (quoted in Champion, 1996, 31). According to one Statistics Canada analyst, teens understand the risk of smoking, but this understanding is not having the desired behavioural impact (Champion, 1996, 31).

The federal government's campaigns to reduce the use of "soft" narcotics and alcohol have had similarly inconclusive behavioural results in the past few years. For example, while the proportion of anglophone 11-17 year-olds admitting to drinking alcohol at least once per month dropped from 25% in 1989 to 11% in 1990, it rose to 17% by 1992. Among francophones in the same age group, rates have remained relatively stable: from 21% in 1987 to 19% in 1993 (Health Canada, 1993, 18-21).

These data raise the question of whether the approach proposed by social marketers offers an effective strategy for changing behaviour.² While social marketing differs from other public communications approaches by stressing such concepts as audience research, message targeting and distribution, it is my contention that the inconclusive results of social marketing programs rest at least in part on social marketers' theoretical assumptions about social change, motivation and communication. As workers in a young 'discipline,' the practitioners of social marketing have been accumulating practical experience on which

² Health Canada social marketers suggest that attitudinal and behavioural change are long term effects of social marketing. While there is no evidence to suggest this is not the case, it raises questions about the causes for the rather sharp declines in smoking and other behaviours that occurred in the 1970s and early 1980s.

strategies and approaches tend to be successful in a given set of circumstances. However, academics and researchers have not given social marketers an adequate theoretical basis for understanding the role of communications in social change. Consequently, rather than providing a framework for developing new and innovative approaches to communications campaigns, the theoretical dimensions of social marketing are lagging behind the practice. As one practitioner puts it, beyond the basics, social marketing theory is “interesting, but not really a guide to what we do” (Ladouceur, August 21, 1996). This thesis will develop a critique of social marketing theory, using a variety of communications, cultural theory and psychological approaches. It is also the contention of this thesis that developing an understanding of social marketing campaigns requires an analysis of the institutional settings in which campaigns are conceived, executed and evaluated. To that end, the critique will briefly examine some of Health Canada’s approaches and the administrative environment of the department’s social marketing apparatus.

Two factors motivate this undertaking. The first is the lack of a coherent critique of public communication campaigns that falls outside the dominant media sociology paradigm. While the tracts of academic discourse on media effects are mountainous and alternative critiques of advertising abound, little scholarly attention has been directed at public communication campaigns beyond the application of mainstream sociology. The second is that public communications campaigns are, at their core, about social control. Social change inherently involves shifts in social power. For example, banning smoking in restaurants allows non-smokers to enjoy a smoke-free atmosphere, while another segment of society is unable to exercise what I will argue can be considered a rhetorical practice

closely tied to self-image and identity. It is my belief that social marketing, as practiced by many institutions lack democratic and humanistic underpinnings. It is my hope that the following critique of social marketing theory provides a degree of self-reflection within a discourse that always seems anxious to *act*. At the same time, however, I wish to provide useful insights for those who practice the craft of persuasive public communications.

Before introducing the overall approach to this analysis, I should delineate its textual basis. While the literature on social marketing has expanded in recent years, the major theoretical basis for social marketing remains the eponymous book by marketing professors Phillip Kotler and Eduardo Roberto. While many articles and essays attempt to explicate social marketing to practitioners, the majority of references to social marketing are based on the approach first developed by Kotler and Roberto.³ Consequently, the critique of social marketing theory becomes primarily a critique of this text. However, this thesis also refers to a larger body of writing on public communication campaigns that share similar approaches to Kotler's and Roberto's. Because social marketing purports to provide a new and disciplined approach to public communications campaigns designed to promote social change (Kotler and Roberto, 1989, 24), works by McGuire, Paisley and others are discussed.

The first part of this critique examines the conception of social change and theories of motivation that underlie social marketing theory. The analysis shows that social marketing sees change as an *a priori* beneficial process consistent with a wider modernist discourse of

progress. In Chapter 1, I argue that social marketing theorists frame social issues at the level of individuals, and that through their research prescriptions, atomize these individuals by removing them from their social contexts. This allows individuals to be seen as rationally motivated, stable and internally consistent. I maintain that this behaviourist conception of the individual shifts attention away from the complex of dynamic social and identity factors that can provide insight into the attitudes and behaviours that social marketing campaigns address. Because social marketing theories isolate audiences, they also underplay issues surrounding power and agency that may be germane to behaviours in question such as smoking, drinking and drug-taking. To provide an alternative method of framing the problematic, I contrast social marketing approaches with competing theories of motivation and rationality including: Freud's (1960) conception of a death wish, Wayne Davis' (1986) theory of desire and Richard Klein's (1993) suggestion that certain behaviour can be traced to a desire to experience a Kantian "negative pleasure." I also briefly examine how other writers such as John Fiske (1993), Dick Hebdige (1988), Lawrence Grossberg (1982) and Kenneth Gergen (1991) develop alternative theories of behaviour which acknowledge issues of power, identity and social and cultural dynamics that reveal the deficiencies of social marketing's behavioural theories. The chapter ends by suggesting how these competing works can be used to modify social marketing's model of behaviour and change and approaches to conducting and interpreting formative research.

The second chapter of this thesis examines the concept at the core of social marketing theory, the social product. Without the idea of exchange, and the social product at the

³ See, for example, Young, 1992, 18; Mintz, 1992, 28; Sarner, 66; and Solomon, 1989, 87.

centre of an exchange, social marketing theories are difficult to distinguish from other approaches to social change communications. I suggest that the concept of a social product, as advanced by social marketing writers, suffers from being defined in narrow, economic terms that may not be an appropriate model on which to conceive of social behaviour. I also argue that because social products are often construed as absences of a behaviour or as concepts rather than tangible goods, they are difficult to market using the techniques of commercial marketing. The difficulties with the idea of a social product, I conclude, have led Health Canada to move away from the concept as a key organizing principle of its anti-smoking campaigns. The chapter ends by presenting other conceptions of products which see goods as manifestations of social distinctions and the materials used in the construction and circulation of social meaning. These views, I suggest, have consequences for how social marketers understand their audiences' behaviours.

Chapter 3 looks at the theories of communications used by social marketing writers and practitioners. A review of different approaches to public communications suggests that while they differ in the tactics they prescribe, the majority tend to conceive of mediated communications as a transmission of a pre-determined message to a passive audience. These messages inoculate audiences with information which shapes their knowledge, attitudes and behaviour in predictable ways. By examining the assumptions of this transmission model, the analysis shows how most communications theories are concordant with the behaviourist motivational assumptions outlined in Chapter 1. I also suggest that the transmission approach to communications found in social marketing theories has practical consequences for under-emphasizing "branding" and "creative" elements of

communication that play with social and identity issues. The hypodermic model espoused by social marketing writers is then contrasted with dialogical and cultural approaches to communication. These latter include communication theories which are rooted in the social meaning of objects, and to suggest alternative ways of thinking about communications and effects that may be germane to reformulating social marketing theory and practice.

Finally, Chapter 4 moves the critique of social marketing from an appraisal of its theory to an assessment of its institutional setting. Examining some of the dynamics operating in the government bureaucracy in which Health Canada's social marketers operate provides a way to explain why theoretically problematic and practically inconclusive social marketing approaches have persisted. The analysis also suggests that administrative factors constrain how social marketers conceive and manage campaigns.

Chapter 1 – Social Change and the Rational Individual

This chapter examines the conceptions of social change found in social marketing and other public communications campaign writings. Its central argument is that social marketing theorists see change as teleological progress akin to that of a wider modernist discourse based on a behaviourist psychology that conceives of the individual as an internally stable entity motivated primarily by rational processes. Social marketers statistically construct the subjects of their campaigns as individuals abstracted from their social and cultural contexts, thereby downplaying or ignoring a complex of factors that can provide insight on the attitudes and behaviour that social marketing seeks to alter. This framing of the problematic is contrasted to those of theorists who locate motivation for behaviour in group and cultural dynamics and present a view of the 'post-modern' individual characterized by shifting subject positions and identity defined in terms of resistance to applications of social power.

Social change and modernism

To understand social marketing, one needs to examine how its proponents comprehend the object of public communications campaigns, social change movements. Public communications discourse focuses on movements which seek to change either social structures or the behaviour of individuals within society (Paisley, 1989, 16). Structural approaches tend to be aimed at bringing about changes to the rules by which society operates. For example, social change campaigns promoting pay equity usually seek to have equity enshrined in laws and regulations and they are almost always closely intertwined

with enforcement strategies. Campaigns aimed at individual behaviour, on the other hand, may not enjoy this close relationship with the mechanisms of the state. As we shall see, when the Canadian government lowered the excise duty on cigarettes in 1994, this manipulation of tobacco's regulatory regime worked against the government's own public communication efforts to reduce tobacco consumption (Hazel, August 16, 1996).

Alternatively, campaigns aimed at reducing the incidence of drug consumption may operate within an enforcement regime that is of little consequence to its target audience. These movements rely (or mostly rely) on information and educational efforts to bring about the desired social change.

Kotler and Roberto define social change campaigns as "organized efforts conducted by one group (the change agent), which intend to persuade others (the target adopters) to accept, modify or abandon certain ideas, attitudes, practices, and behaviour" (Kotler and Roberto, 1989, 6). As the mechanism by which change occurs, the idea of persuasion suggests not only a voluntary process but a reasonable one: beliefs, attitudes and practices are discarded or adopted because the target adopter decides they are in his or her best interest. Kotler and Roberto present four models to show how persuasion works, each following a different sequence of cognition, affect and behaviour. The first model "Learn-Feel-Do" posits that adoption is the result of learning about a new behaviour, developing favourable attitudes towards it and, finally acting on these intentions (Kotler and Roberto, 1989, 94). Two other models, "Do-Feel-Learn", "Learn-Do-Feel" simply change the sequence in which the process occurs (Kotler and Roberto, 1989, 95-97). The fourth model, called the "Multi-path Model" acknowledges that while changes in social behaviour might be more complex, the

process is reducible to permutations and combinations of these sequences (Kotler and Roberto, 1989, 98).

Central to each of these models is the idea of consistency between knowledge, attitudes and behaviour. To engender real change, the social marketer must ensure that attitudes and behaviour are in rational accord with beliefs. In the case of smoking cessation, persuasion occurs when a smoker believes that smoking is harmful or otherwise not in her best interests (at least when compared to the alternative of not smoking) and holds negative attitudes towards smoking and positive attitudes towards smoking cessation. It is worth noting that these models claim to describe not only persuasion, but the adoption of any practice or behaviour (Kotler and Roberto, 1989, 93). Thus, social marketing assumes that consonance between beliefs, attitudes and practice is a normal (and desired) human condition.

This conception of the rational individual can be traced to the rise of scientific empiricism and a focus on the technology of the machine that arose in the Enlightenment. Ultimately, Kotler's and Roberto's assumptions about behaviour arose from the empiricist premise "that the world is composed of fixed and knowable entities," which were transposed onto the concept of the self or the person and developed in the behaviourist psychologies of Skinner, Hull and Tolman (Gergen, 1991, 38-39). Gergen, for example, argues that the "immense attention devoted today to 'cognitive processes' reveals a further dimension of the modernist view: man's essence is rational" (Gergen, 1991, 40). Rather than the clinical approaches of behaviourist psychology, however, social marketers suggest that these same

transformations can occur through mediated and interpersonal communications (Kotler and Roberto, 1989, 24). Like behaviourism, social marketing theories also rest on the assumption that identity – the composite of beliefs, affective states and behaviour – is stable, or at least it should be. The cornerstone in the *belief-attitude-practice* triad is belief. Affective states and behaviours must fall in line with what we know. After all, if we knew that smoking was beneficial, social marketing campaigns would encourage people to adopt the habit, not abandon it. Because empiricism focuses on discovering immutable laws of nature, knowledge (or true belief) stays constant through time. And if knowledge about a certain phenomenon does not change through time, neither should our corresponding attitudes and beliefs. It can also be argued that social marketing theories depend on the assumption that what we know empirically should determine how we behave socially. What social marketing deems socially beneficial is rooted in empirical knowledge of physical phenomena or liberal economic theory: giving up smoking is desirable because medicine and biology show that it is harmful to the organism and produces disease. It also reduces productivity and burdens the economy. We are to be persuaded to act socially in accordance with these physical and economic truths. Social knowledge which might contradict or complicate these are seen as “obstacles” to adoption rather than a sound appreciation of the benefits of the attitudes and practices social marketing campaigns seek to displace (Kotler and Roberto, 1989, 24).

Interestingly, Kotler and Roberto distinguish the persuasive approaches of social marketing from educational strategies. They argue that education-based programs which focus on providing information to target adopters constitute “the bulk of the anti-smoking”

campaigns in the United States, and that these rest on a belief that decisions to stop smoking can be effected by providing information on the “negative consequences” of smoking (Kotler and Roberto, 1989, 22). While Kotler and Roberto imply that this approach is not entirely effective because it is based on the idea that smoking is based on ‘rational decisions,’ their specific criticisms suggest that the inadequacy of educational campaigns is that they are not rationally *executed*. While smokers are typically aware of the health hazards, educational approaches to anti-smoking are limited because health warnings on cigarette packages are “abstract in that the specific dangers are not cited” and that “the repetition of the message probably diminishes the impact” (Kotler and Roberto, 1989, 22).⁴ Presumably, more concrete warnings and better management of delivery channels are the remedy. While Kotler and Roberto’s implied solution is not without merit as an approach to bridge what they call the “dissonance” between smokers’ knowledge of the health hazards and their continued smoking, they do not contradict the idea that changing the behaviour of smokers rests on their rational appraisal of the issues (Kotler and Roberto, 1989, 22).

The underlying rationale for social change shared by social marketing and public communication campaign writers rests on a modernist belief that progress is desirable, in and of its own right. In his analysis of public communications campaigns, Paisley argues that these campaigns all share the core idea of reform, which by definition implies

4 While U.S. warning labels have changed since Kotler and Roberto and Roberto wrote *Social Marketing* in 1989, many, such as “Cigarettes contain carbon monoxide” and “Quitting smoking now greatly reduces serious risks to your health” remain abstract. There is no evidence to suggest that the more concrete warnings of recent years resulted in significant reductions in smoking rates.

improvement: "Reform is any action that makes society better or makes the lives of individuals better. 'Better' is defined by emerging values in a society during each period in its history, such as today's attempts to reform our unhealthy lifestyles" (Paisley, 1989, 16). In writing that social marketing depends on "the belief that [changing behaviour] will contribute to the individual's or society's best interests" and that campaigns aimed at economic development are not achievable "unless citizens first recognise that growth is desirable" (Kotler and Roberto, 1989, 24, 31), Kotler and Roberto align social marketing with modernization theorists such as Lerner (1963) and De Sola Pool (1963). These writers, who argue that economic development is dependent on the diffusion of technological innovations that will only be adopted when the right attitudes prevail,⁵ provide a theoretical underpinning to the approach. Kotler's and Roberto's explanation that social change consists of a process in which "target adopters first are made aware, then are led to take an interest in and to like the innovation, and then are moved to try it and adopt it" (Kotler and Roberto, 1989, 95) is reminiscent of Lerner's communication-based theory of modernization in which social progress "begins with new public communication - the diffusion of new ideas and new information which stimulate people to want to behave in new ways" (Lerner, 1963, 348).

Individuals and groups

The tendency to frame the social change problematic at the level of the individual and the lack of attention paid to agency and power are also consistent with social marketing's

⁵ See, for example, Lerner, 1963, p.348 and De Sola Pool, 1963, p.249.

modernist theoretical roots. Despite Kotler and Roberto's frequent references to the target adopter *group*, social marketers do not analytically distinguish collectives from individuals. In social marketing theory, there is little, if any, difference between an individual smoker and a group of smokers. At the broadest level, the target group is defined because its constituent individuals share an attitude or behaviour. The process of defining the group becomes one of measuring the quantifiable characteristics of the individuals within it. For Kotler and Roberto, target groups are constructed as statistical amalgamations of observable qualities possessed by individuals such as age, income, behaviour and psychological characteristics (Kotler and Roberto, 1989, 27, 65). Observing and chronicling these descriptive variables constitutes, for Kotler and Roberto, the fundamental knowledge required to conceive a campaign: "To know the target adopters in these three related ways enables the social marketer to make more accurate predictions. Predictions, in turn, are prerequisites to the ability to influence outcomes" (Kotler and Roberto, 1989, 27).

Some writings on public communications campaigns pay closer attention to group dynamics. McGuire, for example, suggests that research should unearth the "circumstances that initiate and maintain" the target behaviours (McGuire, 1989, 135). This understanding, however, amounts to narrowing audiences to a set of demographic characteristics and discrete behaviours. For example, in discussing formative research for an anti-drunk driving campaign, Atkin and Freimuth argue that campaigns should focus on the "16-24 year-old males who drink heavily at weekend parties" (Atkin and Freimuth, 1989, 135). While the authors acknowledge that behaviours are socially influenced, at the same time they see these as discrete, quantifiable and almost independently-operating influences.

Thus, the cultural context is reduced to a search for measurable activities, and not complex interactions between individuals and groups :

Most practices are a product of various component behaviours (e.g. drunk driving may be reduced if the driver abstains from alcohol, drinks limited quantities, or allows a sober person to drive home) which in turn are determined by social and environmental factors (e.g. the availability of attractive non-alcoholic drinks, or suggestions by companions to limit consumption) (Atkin and Freimuth, 1989, 136).

The research does not attempt to understand the main group activity - the “weekend parties” that 16-24 year-olds are attending. No consideration is given to the social interactions and attendant cultural elements (e.g. music, movies) that might encourage and reinforce drinking to intoxication. The key behaviour in question - getting drunk - is simply taken as a given characteristic of the individuals in question.

Another element in the notion of group which is missing from social marketing, and most public communications campaign writings, is any sense of the idea that individuals may perceive themselves as members of a group. While both academic texts and campaign materials refer to the influence of peers (McAlister, 1989, 298; Hazel, August 21, 1996), they do not discuss the issue of individuals seeing themselves as group members by virtue of the very attitudes and behaviours of interest to social marketers. The resurgence of cigar smoking in contemporary Western culture is just one example by which groups are

constructed around an “undesirable” behaviour and underlines the extent to which the target behaviours are social as much as individual acts.⁶

Kotler and Roberto’s emphasis on the individual, which takes the behaviour out of its cultural context and constructs the target group as atomized, disparate individuals can be seen in Health Canada’s campaigns. Initial research conducted by the department suggested that health promotion campaigns should focus on Canadian youth at, or slightly younger than, the typical age of adoption of smoking, drinking and illicit drug use (Health Canada, 1991, 2). Thus, these programs initially defined the target group primarily in terms of age and language demographics. While this approach helped guide the allocation of resources at a particular segment of society, at the practical level, it presented dangers when developing specific messages. The approach of Health Canada’s “Break-Free” anti-smoking campaign was strongly youth oriented, with a focus on the portrayal of adolescents in television and print ads (Hazel, August 21, 1996). According to Health Canada officials, the effectiveness of this approach began to be questioned when research suggested that teenagers were responding poorly to the campaign “because it was addressing them as teenagers” (Hazel, August 21, 1996). Had initial campaign research paid more attention to its audience as a group, rather than a collection of individuals, the campaign may have recognized the social importance teenagers place on being perceived as adult. More recent advertisements, while aimed at teenagers, use older actors in their late 20s to try to appeal to this social element.

⁶ See, for example, the chronicle of the 5C club, “The Long Cigar” by David Blum, pp. 106-112 in *Esquire*, October, 1996.

Recognizing that demographic data alone were insufficient explanatory factors for the behaviour in question, Health Canada's 1993 evaluation study of its social marketing campaigns included "a unique categorization system called 'psychographics' to analyze young people's behaviours" in terms of lifestyles and attitudes (Health Canada, 1993, 1). Based on this segmentation approach, the group most likely to smoke and use or abuse alcohol and other drugs consists of about 18% of Canadian youth called the 'TGIF' or 'Thank God It's Friday' segment. Rather than explain their behaviour in terms of a "constellation of attitudes, beliefs, opinions, hopes, fears prejudices, needs, desires and aspirations" that psychographic segmentation promised, the TGIF member is defined primarily in terms of his or her behaviour: "substance use - cigarettes, alcohol, and drugs - is part of this groups' lifestyle" (Health Canada, 1993, 69). According to Health Canada's research, attitudinally, TGIFs:

- are more concerned with the present than the future;
- do not value self-discipline, ambition or the work-ethic;
- require the company of others; and
- lack traditional values.

Once again, other than to note a propensity for socializing, this description of the group merely describes individual characteristics. At the same time, the research suggests that "culture of any sort is not a priority" for this segment (Health Canada, 1993, 69). Could it be that framing the issues at the level of the individual resulted in overlooking the possibility that smoking, drinking, drug use, and parties are a core part of the culture for this segment?

Motivation and agency

Somewhat ironically, social marketing and other public communications campaign approaches tend to under-emphasize social and group issues surrounding its problematic, and as a result, notions of power and agency are also downplayed. If behaviour is abstracted from its social setting, it follows that relations to others, through which identity and social agency are constructed and articulated, tend to be ignored or under-emphasized when analyzing the social 'problem'. Social marketing theories omit a discussion of both the structural and individual articulation of power. At the structural level, Kotler and Roberto deliberately shift the discussion away from the potential conflict arising from such social change issues as birth control and family planning by focusing their analysis on the strategies, tactics and pragmatics of social change, rather than its appropriateness. Sensing that a debate on contentious issues might lead readers to question the teleological premise of social reform and progress generally, *Social Marketing* dismisses the question: "In this book, we emphasize social causes that enjoy widespread public support" (Kotler and Roberto, 1989, 18). Consequently, there is little recognition and no appreciation of the fact that inducing change in the behaviour of individuals, often the ultimate goal of social marketers, requires by definition an exercise of power and a shift in power relations.⁷

In *Social Marketing*, Kotler and Roberto's approach to individual agency consists of examining the feelings that can motivate behavioural change. Fundamental psychological

⁷ This does not necessarily mean that the so-called change agents will ultimately enjoy more power at the expense of the "target adopters." For example, individuals may gain more social agency as a result of kicking a drug habit.

needs that are to be tapped include: “the need for excitement and novelty, the need to be accepted and loved, the need for catharsis and acting out, and the need to imitate and match” (Kotler and Roberto, 1989, 104). These are powerful motivators, all of which have an obvious social dynamic and which are widely exploited by commercial advertising.⁸ Interestingly, Kotler’s and Roberto’s examples suggest that social motivators are often the most important factors in behaviour modification (Kotler and Roberto, 1989, 105-106). However, they devote only two pages of their 353-page book to discussing their relevance to social marketing (Kotler and Roberto, 1989, 105-106), and in doing so, omit from the analysis any sense of social agency. For example, Kotler and Roberto cite research for a safety belt campaign that suggested seat-belt users were motivated by fear of disfigurement in a car crash rather than a fear of death: “the need to be attractive was a stronger motivator than the need to survive” (Kotler and Roberto, 1989, 105). However, because Kotler and Roberto do not discuss attractiveness as social capital which is used in structuring relations among individuals and how body image is fundamentally tied to identity, they do not consider the idea of agency as an explanatory factor in *not* wearing a seat belt. As a result, the idea of a need to risk death and disfigurement, or to perceive oneself as immune from them, do not surface as possible motivating factors.

Four aspects of how this is treated theoretically merit attention. First, *Social Marketing* examines feelings, which, unlike relationships, can be seen as belonging to an individual on a par with demographic characteristics. The emphasis, then, is on the individual’s affective state and not on the social dynamics which motivate affect and in which these states are

⁸ See for example, Judith Williamson’s *Decoding Advertisements*.

articulated as attitudes and behaviour. Second, feelings are seen principally as motivators to encourage the adoption of a new attitude or behaviour. They are not discussed in any significant way as explanatory factors for the attitudes and behaviours that a social marketer may want to displace. Third, because the social context of these feelings is unexplored, issues of agency and power are ignored. Finally, like commercial marketers, social marketers focus their discussion of affective states as inputs that the social marketer must seek to control.

Kotler and Roberto suggest that individuals adopt a new practice or behaviour for one or more of four reasons: compliance with a regulation, identification with others who have already adopted the practice, knowledge that the practice is reasonable and an internal feeling that the practice is “the right thing to do” (Kotler and Roberto, 1989, 92-93). One of these reasons, identification, addresses the social and cultural contexts of the adopter group. And while it is seen as a motivator, it is not discussed in terms of the initial belief, attitude or behaviour in question. To borrow from *Social Marketing*’s example, people may join a car pool because other people they admire are in car pools (Kotler and Roberto, 1989, 92). Identification does not arise, however, as an analytical tool in assessing pre-existing belief, attitudes and behaviour. If social marketers considered driving behaviour in a socio-cultural context they might develop an appreciation for how identity issues factor into why people prefer *not* to car pool. Such an analysis might also reveal other elements tied to social effectivity, such as socio-economic status, taste, and the sense of power and independence that can arise from driving fast on an open-road with the windows down and the stereo turned up loud.

Creatively, this analysis of agency (or lack thereof) may lead to simplified messages. For example, in the seat-belt campaign, it follows that if fear of disfigurement is a strong motivator of seat belt use, the social marketer should promote seat belts as a means to prevent disfigurement. Because attractiveness is seen as a passive state, however, it is taken to be a benefit in and of itself. When personal appearance is seen dynamically, as an element of interpersonal relations, it becomes a means to an end, or a way to articulate both agency and identity. This perspective has different implications for messaging strategies. Two examples, one from a social marketing campaign and one from a current television advertisement may help illustrate this distinction. In conducting research on cigarette smoking, Health Canada learned that teenagers often tend to ignore the health risks of smoking because these are seen as distant possibilities in a remote future (Hazel, August 16, 1996). Consequently, Health Canada decided to emphasize the more immediate effects of smoking, such as smelly clothes and bad breath (Hazel, August 16, 1997). However, the effectiveness of this approach depends on the extent to which the smell of cigarette smoke impedes agency among teen smokers to a greater extent than cigarette smoking may enhance it. For current smokers, the smell goes virtually unnoticed. And if one's immediate peer group consists primarily of smokers, the odour is a limited liability at worst. It is not hard to imagine that some people may even like the smell, associating it with a parent or adult who smokes. However, because Health Canada has viewed clean smelling clothes and hair as a static benefit, rather than a factor in interpersonal relations, the potential liability in the strategy remained unconsidered until after the campaign had already been developed.

A television advertisement for men's cotton trousers running at the time of writing highlights the difference when attributes are considered in their social context. In the advertisement, two men are in shirts and boxer shorts, waiting for their slacks to be finished in the clothes dryer. They are getting ready for a date, both with the same woman, who is waiting, stopwatch in hand, to see which man will be ready first. One man has regular cotton pants, which, when they emerge from the dryer are wrinkled and must be ironed before he can claim the woman as his date. The other man has the advertised pants, which are wrinkle-resistant and ready to wear as soon as they emerge from the dryer. The man with the wrinkle-resistant slacks, is dressed and ready, and naturally "gets the girl" while his competitor is still ironing. This advertisement clearly makes the most (some might argue too much) of the social element. The benefit is not that the slacks do not require ironing and can save time. It is rather, that these features put the man who has the wrinkle-resistant slacks at an advantage in a social situation heavily invested with sexuality, competition and judgement. The benefit emerges in the wearer's relations with others, not in the slacks themselves.

These examples do not imply that social marketing theory precludes the development of communication strategies which exploit the social capital of certain attitudes and behaviours by presenting them in terms of social relations. They are meant to suggest, however, that abstracting social problems from their relational contexts and ignoring issues of power, agency and identity can lead to approaches that fail to address salient issues related to the attitudes and behaviour in question and, consequently impede both communications strategies and tactics.

Non-rationalist approaches to behaviour

Other non-behaviourist approaches can give social marketers insight into the attitudes and behaviour they address. I will briefly explore several theoretical alternatives which acknowledge and explore some of the issues omitted in Kotler's and Roberto's analysis of behaviour and motivation. First, I will examine alternative motivations for behaviour which do not *a priori* suppose a rational or consistent agent (when rationality is defined in terms of a narrow correspondence between the acknowledgement of empirical truths, attitudes and behaviour). Philosophical psychologist Wayne Davis's (1986) analysis of desire as a motivation will suggest that desire can affect behaviour even in the face of strong rational and social countervailing forces. Davis's distinction between two types of desire suggests that social marketing deals only with those desires that are subject to rational constructs and not those which subvert rationality. Although Davis does not offer a prescription for addressing irrational motivators, his approach suggests that a rational construction of behaviour is limited. Continuing an exploration of irrational motivation, I will briefly introduce Freud's (1960, 1961) understanding of a death wish as a framework in which supposedly irrational and self-destructive behaviour can be acknowledged within a motivational context. Davis's and Freud's articulations of irrational motivation, because they are descriptive rather than prescriptive, do not posit approaches that can be used in social change. A second group of writers, however, including John Fiske (1993), Lawrence Grossberg (1992), Dick Hebdige (1988) and Kenneth Gergen (1991), all of whom situate an analysis of behaviour and identity within social situations of power and difference offer approaches that have operational implications for social change research and strategies.

Wayne Davis distinguishes between two types of psychological states that are often designated by the same word, desire. One, volitive desire, is “synonymous with want, wish and would like” (Davis, 1986, 63). A second sense, “appetitive desire” refers to such states as “appetite, hunger, craving, yearning, longing and urge” (Davis, 1986, 64). Davis’s essay on the ambiguity of desire provides an argument that can be used to show how motivational assumptions in the public communications discourse in general, and social marketing in particular, are under-theorized.

Davis makes two key distinctions between volitive and appetitive desire that are relevant to a discussion of motivation. The first is that a volitive desire is less likely to produce pleasure than an appetitive one. For example, the proposition ‘I wish that it would rain’ is not likely to imply as great a pleasure in its satisfaction as the statement ‘I crave a tuna steak’ (Davis, 1986, 71). The second distinction between the two types of desire is rationality. “Volitive desires are typically based on reasons” (Davis, 1986, 70). For example, the reason for wanting to eat may be to get nourishment. “Appetitive desires, in contrast, are not the sorts of thing we have reasons for or against... Appetitive desires can be explained but are not motivated. In this respect, appetitive desires are more like aches and pains, while volitive desires resemble beliefs” (Davis, 1986, 70).

Davis also outlines a relationship between the two sorts of desire. While both can result in action, appetitive desires tend to motivate them indirectly, and often, more strongly.

Appetitive desires will often produce actions by creating volitive desires. John may have a craving for a cigarette (appetitive desire), but not want one (volitive desire) because he

knows it is bad for him (rationale). The craving however, may produce a volitive desire leading to John wanting and getting a cigarette. Davis's argument implies that rational, persuasive approaches tend to work best on simple volitive desires and not on the appetitive desires (Davis, 1986, 71). Strong appetitive desires resist countervailing forces. As Davis explains, a married man may have an urge to sleep with another woman, but may not want to because he believes it is immoral (Davis, 1986, 71). Morality, in this case, acts as a countervailing factor to the fulfillment of the desire. Sometimes, however, the appetitive desire may be difficult or even impossible to resist (Davis, 1986, 71).

This distinction between two sorts of desire is useful for an examination of the motivational assumptions in social marketing theory. As discussed earlier, social marketing texts make no distinction between the two types of motivation discussed earlier, even when they engage behaviours often intrinsically linked with objects of appetitive desires such as sex, smoking, drinking and eating. Typically, social marketers discuss motivation as volitive desires, or in terms of having a reason for an attitude or behaviour. Because social marketing theorists assume that behaviour is rationally motivated, they propose using both reasons and value judgments as countervailing factors. For instance, Kotler and Roberto cite the example of the American Cancer Society whose research suggested that smoking's appeal included relaxation and occupying time. Promoting smoking cessation entailed a rational alternative to keeping busy and staying relaxed, which the American Cancer Society (ACS) translated into a brochure entitled "12 Things To Do Instead of Smoking" (Kotler and Roberto, 1989, 49). However, according to Kotler and Roberto, the approach was not successful: none of the 12 items "appeared to the target-adopter group as superior

to smoking as a means of relaxing and filling one's time" (Kotler and Roberto, 1989, 49).

The implication is that the successful approach is to discover even better alternatives that fill time and promote relaxation. The ACS's strategy offered rational alternatives; it did not look for underlying desires that might motivate the need to fill one's time or stay relaxed. While it addressed the volitive desires associated with smoking it did not address the reasons why smokers might need to relax or fill their time, or fulfill the (irrational) appetitive desires at the core of this behaviour.

Social marketing theorists imply that cognitive dissonance between knowledge and attitudes and behaviour will motivate the individual to align her behaviour in rational accordance (McGuire, 1989, 55; Kotler and Roberto, 1989, 22). Davis, on the other hand, argues that this is not always the case. His approach to motivation helps explain why defining wants and needs in relation to the behaviour in question will not always yield effective alternatives: because motivation in the form of desire operates outside a rational framework, the model must be reworked to include and address non-rational situations.

Another conception of motivation which allows for contradictions and does not suppose a linear rationality can be found in Sigmund Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and *Civilization and its Discontents*. In these works, Freud posits a death instinct which underlies the pleasure principle. The death instinct serves as an explanatory factor for clinical observation that many patients repeat experiences which are patently unpleasurable. From this observation, Freud developed an idea of an instinct, "an urge inherent in organic life to restore to an earlier state of things, which the living entity has been obliged to

abandon” (Freud, 1960, 205). This instinct exists in tension to, and in conflict with, sexual or erotic instincts that drive humans to develop the structure of culture and society.

“[B]esides the instincts to preserve living substance and to join it into ever larger units, there must exist another, contrary instinct seeking to dissolve those units and bring them back to their primeval, inorganic state” (Freud, 1960, 65-66). Freud’s speculations that the repression of this aggressive death instinct by sexual instincts constitutes the fundamental dynamic of the evolution of civilization, provide an interesting analogy from which to consider the project of social marketing. However, it is the idea of co-existing and conflicting motivational forces which interest us here because they question social marketing’s assumption that individuals are inherently consistent. The idea that an individual possesses, at the fundamental level, both the desire for reproduction and social integration and opposing forces of aggression and self-destruction, provides a radically different conceptual framework from which to view behaviours such as smoking, drinking, the use of narcotics, and driving while intoxicated.

Both Davis’s and Freud’s alternative conceptions of motivation provide competing theories to social marketers’ insistence on rational mechanistic processes. If they are accepted, they point to a need to re-examine the model of behaviour on which social marketing is premised. To some extent, however, these alternatives lend themselves to a fatalistic stance: if these fundamental desires motivating behaviour are not subject to rational precepts, what can be done other than to accept them? Other writers who understand motivation in social and cultural contexts, however, provide a foundation from which to re-work the social marketing model of motivation. Not the least of these is Richard Klein

(1993), who, by explicating the social and cultural elements of the irrationality of smoking, provides a departure point for re-conceiving and implementing public communications campaigns. Klein argues that rationality has little if anything to do with smoking or quitting smoking. While acknowledging nicotine's addictive properties, Klein maintains that smoking is for the smoker, access to the sublime, a negative beauty, an infinity (Klein, 1993, 2). It is the desire to experience the sublime that drives the smoker, not rational needs. Klein maintains that virtually every smoker knows that the habit is unhealthy, and therefore, knowledge, or the cognitive effects of social marketing transmitted by media campaigns, are unlikely to have a significant impact on behaviour. "Understanding the noxious effects of cigarettes is not usually sufficient reason to cause anyone to stop smoking or resist starting" (Klein, 1993, 1).

Klein's *Cigarettes are Sublime* frames smoking not just as a health problem, as do social marketers, but one of self-identification and manifestation of an irrational need for dark pleasures:

Cigarettes are not positively beautiful, but they are sublime by virtue of their charming power to propose what Kant would call a 'negative pleasure': a darkly beautiful, inevitably painful pleasure that arises from some intimation of eternity... Warning smokers or neophytes of the dangers entices them more powerfully to the edge of the abyss, where... they can be thrilled by the subtle grandeur of the perspectives on mortality opened by the little terrors in every puff (Klein, 1993, 2).

By viewing smoking as a social, cultural and even philosophical phenomenon, and not simply the unhealthy behaviour of individuals, Klein is able to argue that cigarettes have social benefits, perhaps the most important of which is the facilitation of social discourse and interaction (Klein, 1993, 17). Cigarettes for example, serve social discourse by

providing an index of adulthood and reliability, and function as a “universal token of exchange” that bridges social and cultural boundaries as well as economic gaps (Klein, 1993, 7, 136).

Examining smoking as a form of currency in the dynamics of social economics has practical implications that can be used in expanding the social marketing model of behaviour and motivation. The major premise of *Cigarettes are Sublime*, that smoking is a culturally resonant practice which evokes images, literature, adventure, eroticism and danger, should make social marketers aware that the behaviours they seek to displace are not simple individual choices⁹. In marketing discourse, it also suggests that direct advertising and promotion of cigarettes are not the only, or even the main form of competition. This implies a broader, and admittedly more daunting task for anti-smoking campaigns - tackling the cultural position of smoking that has evolved from the encrustation of repeated symbolization of both cigarettes and their consumption.

Klein also explicitly addresses issues of power relationships that traditional public communications campaigns do not. For example, he shows how cigarettes have social uses for smokers (to symbolise personality traits) that give smokers agency in social intercourse. In so doing, he makes explicit the power relationships between anti-smoking forces and smokers, suggesting that the desire to suppress smoking can be linked not to concern for health as much as the desire to establish a public morality (Klein, 1993, 15). He also

⁹ See for example, McKim, 1994, p.16.

suggests that the right to smoke is linked to other individual rights, such as the political emancipation of women, which can be indexed by women's right to enjoy smoking in the places and to the degree that men do (Klein, 1993, 131-132). The articulations of power and agency contained and symbolized in the act of smoking raises a distinct irony in anti-smoking campaigns: precisely because cigarette consumption is unhealthy, and trumpeted as such, its practice is all the more attractive because it flies in the face of conventional wisdom and authority.

Ideas of agency and resistance are also developed as explanatory concepts by writers such as Fiske, Grossberg and Hebdige. These authors suggest that behaviours of interest to social marketers can, in some instances, be understood as attempts to forge identity and agency in response to the structural application of power. What these writers share is a dual insistence that power is fundamental to understanding behaviour and that these forces must be interpreted dynamically: power mediates attitudes and behaviour (on many planes) and is not merely a characteristic possessed by individuals.

In *Power Plays, Power Works*, Fiske (1993) approaches contemporary culture through the lens of power and resistance, examining how dominant social structures create opportunities for and acts of resistance in the cultural sphere. In the essay "Bodies of Knowledge", Fiske draws on Bakhtin, Foucault and de Certeau to examine the articulations of the top-down power of social institutions and the elaboration of resistance. Fiske's discussion rests on Foucault's conception of disciplining forces of society which operate through various institutions and conventions to ensure the efficient running of society (Fiske, 1993, 11).

While society's technologies of power attempt to "push the people" to conform with the prevailing ideological direction, Fiske's theory of agency argues that people have a need to contest these in the decisions and choices they make in their daily lives in order to negotiate contradictory forces (Fiske, 1993, 23).¹⁰

Fiske argues that the "constitution of individuality" is the site of struggles where the power bloc attempts to produce disciplined individuals necessary to a complex social order (Fiske, 1993, 66). This occurs as a process which "separates an individual from others for the purposes of documentation, evaluation and control" (Fiske, 1993, 67). Working against individuation is the sense of identity: "Bottom-up individuality is the product of a person's history, of family ties and continuities... how an individual has made use of the resources and structures of a social order is quite different from the history of that individual that is documented in the data banks of the power-bloc" (Fiske, 1993, 67-68). Individual identities are constructed in tension and struggle with the disciplining powers of society, and defined in relation to them: "a defining characteristic of people's consciousness in disciplinary societies is the sense of difference between the individuals that *we* think we are and those whom we know *they* want us to be" (Fiske, 1993, 68). The processes by which this identity is formed and "held" tend to be tactical, in that they work within the system defined by the dominant order for momentary occupation of time, space and resources (Fiske, 1993, 69). Identity construction depends on the ability to "masquerade or to dissemble identity" and exploit opportunities to use the social order's resources for aims outside those of society's disciplining forces (Fiske, 1993, 68). Both elements of this struggle - individuation and

¹⁰ Cf. Freud's idea of the tension between reproductive and death instincts in *Civilization and Its Discontents*.

individualism - are suggestive at several levels in an examination of social marketing.

First, the entire social change project invoked by social marketers, for instance, can be conceived as a strategic exercise in top-down power creating "disciplined bodies" that better serve the social order: healthy, balanced, productive.¹¹ Tactically, the use of extensive research to segment target markets and hence define them is an obvious instance of individuation. At the localized level, the persistence of some of the behaviours (smoking, the use of drugs, speeding) can be conceptualized as resistance against individuation central to the process of identity formation in disciplined societies.

The idea of using symbols to define identity within a group culture is further developed by Dick Hebdige (1988), who surfaces the political dimensions of youth culture in his examination of the social and commercial construction of youth. Like Fiske, Hebdige sees subcultures as structured "underneath the authorized discourses, in the face of the multiple disciplines of the family, the schools, and the workplace" (Hebdige, 1988, 35). In his analysis, Hebdige observes that youth culture is dependent on signs, images and metaphors (Hebdige, 1988, 35). The social use of symbols and stances - such as riding an Italian scooter, wearing a mohawk or adopting a "mod way of standing" can help to define both allegiance to a particular sub-culture and one's own position within(out) the larger society (Hebdige, 1988, 30).

¹¹ This does not necessarily imply that social marketing campaigns are unethical disciplines that should be resisted: as Fiske notes, discipline is not essentially bad; in fact, it is a prerequisite for order and continuity.

Social constructions and manifestations of identity are also discussed by Lawrence Grossberg (1992) in his analysis of rock-and-roll culture. Grossberg provides a more detailed theoretical account of the operation of resistances in social practices by placing them within complex and shifting environment. While characteristics such as gender, race, ethnicity are relevant to identity and behaviour, these variables must be cast within a dynamic social system to garner analytic and explanatory value:

People are never only Black or female or working-class; people's identities are defined precisely by the complex articulations between their different positions in a variety of systems of social difference... People often occupy a position of domination in one set of social differences, and a position of subordination in another. A specific social group, by virtue of its place within one set of social differences, may have access to certain systems of value, but not to others. And the relative importance of different social difference, as well as of different social values, depends in part on the particular configuration of the social field, and the position of a social group within it (Grossberg, 1992, 99).

Grossberg argues that the relative importance of what *Social Marketing* would label the descriptive characteristics of the target population change depending on particular social contexts. Thus, while being educated might be relevant to certain behaviours, at other times it becomes less important. Unlike the relatively stable notions of identity assumed in social marketing theory, Grossberg sees identity as fluid and mutable. "Any particular difference... is always augmented and reshaped by other differences. At different moments and places in people's lives, they reorder the hierarchical relations among these differences; they redefine their identity out of these relations" (Grossberg, 1992, 105). Because virtually all behaviour is "complexly articulated into relations of power" (Grossberg, 1992, 100), practices which might be seen as resistant are not the exclusive domain of marginalized classes or youth subcultures. Using the example of a rock music fan, Grossberg suggests that associated

practices might sometimes be visible in terms of dress or identity. Most often, however, these “do not appear on the surface of a fan’s life, or even as the primary way in which most fans would define themselves” (Grossberg, 1992, 105). Nevertheless, being a fan can still function as a characteristic of identity and can be articulated in relation to authorized structures and discourses at certain moments and in particular situations (Grossberg, 1992, 105).

Gergen, whose analysis of the rise of empiricism provides a context for understanding social marketing theory’s modernist foundations, also addresses the notion of shifting subject positions. Gergen’s thesis is that the spread of communications technologies are breaking down modernist assumptions of the self and the social order through a process he calls “social saturation” (Gergen, 1991, 74). By providing people with a multiplicity of opportunities (indeed the necessity) to communicate with others, the notion of a stable, constant self is becoming meaningless. “It is not only the immediate community that occupies our thoughts and feelings, but a constantly changing cast of characters spread across the globe” (Gergen, 1991, 62). This amounts to an explosion in the number and variety of relationships in which the individual participates, even if this participation is mediated and vicarious (Gergen, 1991, 64–65). These new relationships present a boundless array of opportunities and consequently frustrations and are often based on conflicting rationalities, as “the range of our relationships is expanded, the validity of each localized rationality is threatened” (Gergen, 1991, 78). Thus the notion of a stable, rational individual gives way to the notion of the self contained in a negotiated, multiplicity of subject positions which can contain conflicting rational premises when observed from a detached

perspective: “under post-modern conditions, persons exist in a state of continuous construction and reconstruction; it is a world where anything goes that can be negotiated” (Gergen, 1991, 7).

This conception of the individual provides a framework for understanding the apparent disjunctures between beliefs, attitudes and behaviour that social marketing merely seeks to correct. The phenomena of doctors using tobacco and investment bankers smoking pot and listening to rock music after work – which social marketing discourse sees merely as dissonance – can be conceptualized as instances of shifting subject positions which are founded on conflicting rationalities. Another element of the demise of the modernist notion of the self is an increasing challenge to authority, also observed by Fiske and Hebdige. Where modernist empiricism eroded the authority of those who did not share its processes for the generation of knowledge, Gergen argues that the post-modern world questions all forms of authority, as these are recognized as merely offering a point of view (Gergen, 1991, 124).

What are the implications for social marketing of these competing theories of behaviour and motivation? At a fundamental level, they suggest a need to revise the social marketing model of social change. Instead of resting on the assumption that change has value because it promises greater physical health, productivity or reduced medical expenditures, social change models also need to determine what is being lost in the proposed reform. These models need to enquire about the existence of possible social and psychological benefits of the attitudes and behaviour in question. These benefits – if they can be seen to exist – then

need to be situated in terms of individuals' social positions and interactions. By examining attitudes and behaviour in fluid social contexts, social marketing theory can more fully account for their persistence in terms of social effectivity and identity that do not necessarily obey the rules of the behaviourist economy of rational needs and satisfaction.

The process of recognizing and mapping the various social planes on which the targeted behaviours are articulated should also promote the recognition that including agency and power in social change models will give them more breadth to realistically account for the over-determination of behaviours. This has to occur on two levels. At the individual level, behaviours such as smoking, drinking, speeding and using drugs, when placed in their social contexts, can be conceived, in part, as manifestations of individuals' need to articulate social agency. At a broader level, public communicators and social marketers should see their efforts as instances of the application of social power. This recognition should spawn another – that the campaigns themselves can structure resistances which undermine the campaign's very goals. As Klein observes of cigarette smoking, "knowing it is bad seems an absolute precondition of acquiring and confirming the cigarettes habit" (Klein, 1993, 1). When pursued by government institutions already widely perceived as part of the social power bloc, doing the reverse of what is urged can become a social act of resistance. This perspective might see smokers who are required to take their habit out of doors and cluster in front of office buildings as a refashioning of the corporate campus, a brief conversion of building entrances from manifestations of organizational power into locales in which they indulge a private pleasure on company time (Fiske, 1993, 70).

Changing social marketing's model to account for group settings and social power also has implications for how research is conducted and interpreted. First, it requires research approaches that go beyond measuring demographic and psychographic variables. Because traditional administrative research methods such as group interviews and telephone and mail surveys gather data from subjects who tend to be removed from their habitual social (and often physical) space, it is not surprising that findings tend to abstract individuals from their social discourses. Adopting research approaches that focus on or occur within "native" social settings can provide insight into the target behaviours. For example, in the account of drunk driving discussed earlier, this could include participant accounts of the social interactions that occur at the parties where intoxication becomes problematic. It could also include observation of smokers in bars, outside workplaces and in schools' designated smoking sections. Research of this nature might provide an opportunity to map the social dimensions of smoking, drinking and the use of narcotics. Furthermore, if the premise of stable and constant identity is forsaken, research strategies need to explore situations both marked by the presence of the behaviour in question and its absence. Formative research on smoking should therefore examine smokers' taking a cigarette break outside their office buildings and what they do before and after.

Second, interpretation of research findings should actively consider the dynamic social aspects and possible instances of the articulation of power. Frequently, survey research on smoking and drug use links these behaviours to poorly educated and economically disadvantaged segments of society (Health and Welfare Canada, 1992b, 19). Often, the correlation of less schooling with smoking is interpreted as a evidence for the need to

educate this segment on the health consequences of these behaviours. Read in the light of social power, these correlations could also be interpreted to suggest that more educated members of society typically enjoy wider opportunities to express agency through careers and purchasing power. As Fiske might argue, individuals in these segments are more disciplined and hence rewarded by the top-down power structure of society: disciplined agents are effective and empowered (Fiske, 1993, 66). Undisciplined individuals, on the other hand, may tend to adopt “undesirable” behaviours such as smoking and narcotic use, which can be seen as practices of resistance and/or symbols of class affiliation.

Theories of motivation and behaviour that resist the tendency to assume simple rational processes and diminish social and cultural aspects of behaviour also have implications for planning campaigns and developing communication materials. These will be explored in the next chapter, which examines the concept of the social product which is at the centre of social marketing theory.

Chapter 2 - The social product: selling an absence

This chapter examines one of the fundamental concepts of social marketing – the social product. Because social marketing theorists borrow from their commercial cousins, their approach to implementing social change centres on the concept of exchange. If marketing “consists of all activities designed to generate and facilitate any exchange intended to satisfy human needs or wants” (Sommers, 1989, 4) social marketing similarly revolves around exchange. In commercial marketing individuals and organizations exchange goods or services for something of value (usually money), while in social marketing, individuals and organizations adopt a “social product” (Kotler and Roberto, 1989, 139). Like the consumer or business products of commerce, the social product is at the centre of social marketing, because without it, there can be no exchange. As Kotler and Roberto write, “[d]esigning the social product is the foundation on which all the elements of the marketing mix are built” (Kotler and Roberto, 1989, 139). In social marketing, products are the beliefs, attitudes, values or behaviours that the social change agents would like certain individuals or institutions to adopt (Kotler and Roberto, 1989, 25, 140). Other elements of the discipline, such as communication and distribution, are designed to encourage trial of the product. If the adopters find the product wanting, the belief, attitude or action is unlikely to become ingrained (Kotler and Roberto, 1989, 108,192).

This analysis of social products begins by examining the idea of needs that motivate subjects to participate in an exchange process. The review shows in some detail that social marketing discourse under-theorizes needs and wants, a shortcoming which is concordant

with the idea discussed in the previous chapter of the individual as an atomized, almost a-social being. I then examine the often conceptual and “negative” products which social marketers such as Kotler and Roberto and Fine advance as ways to meet the needs of target adopters. By exploring some of the practical difficulties associated with the marketing of concepts which are in fact not products in the traditional sense of the word, I attempt to question the relevance of using the exchange/product metaphor as a basis for planning and executing social change communications campaigns. I then briefly show how the narrow view of a social product offered in social marketing discourse has been to a certain extent abandoned in Health Canada’s latest anti-smoking social marketing campaign. Finally, I introduce alternative theories of products which emphasize social and cultural roles of consumption and suggest that these can both contribute to a critique of social marketing discourse and provide direction for theoretical remediation and an enhanced scope of practice.

Demand and needs

At centre of the exchange dynamic is the idea of a need. Needs and wants are what motivate the exchange process: without them, there is no reason to engage in the process. Despite this centrality, needs and wants are given only brief theoretical consideration in social marketing discourse. While social marketers see products within an economic framework of need satisfaction, they tend to focus their energies on the product rather than the need. A discussion of needs, however, will further the development of a critique of social marketing: understanding the limitations of social marketing theory’s concept of

needs provides a basis for understanding the limitations of practical approaches (i.e. products and their marketing) that are based on the theory. Four elements of the discourse's concept of needs will be explored: the tendency to see needs as pre-existing, almost natural states of the consumer; the view that needs are best understood in terms of material utility; the conflation of needs and desire in a single concept; and, the confusion of target adopters' needs with the goals of a social marketing organization.

In a general sense, social marketing texts tend to treat needs as pre-existing conditions. For example, the role of social marketers, as defined by Kotler and Roberto, is to *discover* the needs of target adopters and develop products to satisfy them (Kotler and Roberto, 1989, 139). This approach is evident in Kotler and Roberto's discussion of problem-detection analysis. Problem-detection research asks subjects to visualize themselves in the situation that the social marketer desires and to express any concerns they might have about this situation. The social marketer then asks the target adopter to discuss and to rate the intensity and frequency of these concerns to determine which concerns are to be addressed by the social product (Kotler and Roberto, 1989, 142). While this approach can help social marketers understand potential obstacles to adopting their products, it is unlikely to lead to an appreciation of the benefits of existing behaviours (smoking, drinking, drug taking, unprotected sex, driving rather than using public transit, etc.). The focus, instead, is on identifying needs which are presumed to exist, *a priori*, within the subject. Problem-detection research does not, for instance, enquire as to the origin of the subject's needs, or whether and when these might be displaced by other needs or motivators. For the most part, Kotler's and Roberto's discussion of needs (or "demand", as they often call it) centres

on classifying needs: demand can be faltering or unmet or irregular or dual or unwholesome or abstract (Kotler and Roberto, 1989, 143-148). Here Kotler and Roberto's approach reinforces the notion that needs are pre-existing: by classifying them like mineral specimens, needs become solidified, static and given.

Social marketing writer Seymour Fine also tends to treat needs as a pre-existing condition of a potential adopter or consumer by focusing his discussion on discovering needs and creating products to satisfy them: "products are designed to satisfy *the* needs of *the* markets for which they are intended" (Fine, 1990, 6, emphasis mine). While Fine considers the subject as a static composite of beliefs and wants, he explores them in more detail than Kotler and Roberto by introducing Maslow's hierarchical classification of needs as a guide to designing products. Social marketers must determine which group of needs are fulfilled and which are unfulfilled when developing product attributes: "until a lower order need is satisfied, there is little point in appealing to one above in the hierarchy" (Fine, 1990, 92). In some respects, this is an analytical position rather than a theoretical conviction. Marketing focuses on *satisfying* needs, not on *understanding* them. From a practical perspective, seeing needs as static and pre-existing allows the social marketer to treat them as a stable assumption and concentrate his energies on the process of need satisfaction.

In critiquing Kotler's and Roberto's, and Fine's, understanding of demand as need, it is also important to note how their conceptual framework locates need within the consumer. It is the consumer who *has* needs, is endowed with them, and because these are pre-existing, there is a tacit assumption that demand is somehow a natural component of the consumer's

material and psychological existence. In the following quote from Kotler and Roberto, this orientation manifests itself in the direct correspondence between the needs of the target adopter and the social product: "The first requirement of success in social marketing is either to create a new social product to meet a need that is not being satisfied or to design a better product than those that are available" (Kotler and Roberto, 1989, 28). Note that for Kotler and Roberto, a need can exist quite independently of a product or service to satisfy it. Also, in this configuration, the direction of the consumer-product relationship is one-way; the needs of the target adopter determine the content and structure of the social product. While I do not wish to deny that needs can be natural and resident in a consumer in that they are determined by biological and psychological processes, this conception is narrow in that it fails to recognize that needs (and desire) could be strongly structured by the consumer's social life. Again, while neither Kotler and Roberto nor Fine explicitly deny the role of social processes and shaping needs or desire, neither do they address it or suggest that it may be a fruitful line of inquiry for research. Their one-way linear framework of needs and satisfaction also fails to admit the possibility of a more complex dynamic that works in the other direction, where needs and desires are fuelled and shaped by the products on offer.

By seeing needs as natural states or impulses, social products are conceived primarily as providers of material or psychological utility. Because needs are defined in relation to an atomized individual, the sole function of the product is to meet these demands. Beverages quench thirst, automobiles provide transportation, and cigarettes help smokers relax. In other words, products are seen primarily in direct relation to an immediate and limited need.

This is evident in the nature of solutions that social marketers such as Kotler and Roberto propose (finding other things to do with your hands other than smoke), as well as the view that ‘branding’ a product requires little more than providing a name, some memorable packaging and ensuring production quality is uniformly high (Kotler and Roberto, 1989: 139, Fine, 1990, 82). The function of the product in social marketing is economic in the narrowest sense of the term – the product addresses an immediate material or psychological concern. Beyond this, the product plays little or no role worthy of investigation in the writings of either Kotler and Roberto or Fine.

This economistic conception of products not only neglects other important functions they may play, it is limited in that it conflates need and desire. Following Appadurai (1986), one might distinguish between two different orders of demand in the terms need and desire. Needs are typically assumed to be fixed and limited while desire, by its nature “is assumed to be infinite and transcultural” (Appadurai, 1986, 29). The following example can illustrate the distinction to show how these two different types of motives can together shape a common behavioural outcome. A man who needs to commute to work every day may satisfy this need by purchasing a Cadillac. However, he might also meet this need by purchasing a subway pass or a used compact car. If the same man desires recognition for his economic achievement, he may be more inclined to the Cadillac. While the acquisition of the luxury car may meet his need for transportation, it is less likely to fully satisfy his desire for recognition and standing, which is more abstract and unassimilable because, unlike the ride to work, it depends on his experience of his social relations. Social marketers’ failure to distinguish between needs and desires is consistent with their view of

the subject as a fundamentally rational agent. Even if demand is innate and exists as an internal aspect of the consumer (which is by no means self-evident) surely demand that is fuelled by desire requires a different approach than that which is driven more by need? Social marketing texts, however, provide neither the theoretical nor the analytical tools to assess these different types of motivations.

Despite their almost ahistorical approach to needs that motivate their subjects, there are a few brief glimpses in Fine's, and Kotler and Roberto's writing that needs may have some relation to a subject's social position. Fine, for example, suggests that the enforcement of social norms can be reflected in consumption patterns. In an "other-directed society" such as the United States, where conformity is ensured "through sensitivity to the expectations and preferences of others" some consumption may be made "for the sake of others' approval" (Fine, 1990, 92). Although this formulation implicitly recognizes that needs are socially conditioned, it still treats them as static and pre-existing. Needs and ensuing consumption patterns are related to one of three types of consumers who are chiefly motivated by either tradition, internal goals or the expectations of others (Fine, 1990, 92). For Fine, the relative proportion of each type of consumer within a society may change, but again, these motivations are taken as a given condition of the subject. In the few instances where Kotler and Roberto examine needs in terms of social relations, these are not to explore the social production of needs and how these dynamics figure in undesirable behaviour. Instead, social needs tend to be seen as opportunities to manipulate behaviour. Kotler and Roberto's discussion of a family planning agency seeking to reduce family size in a society where large families provide a measure of economic security provides a

startling example (Kotler and Roberto, 1989, 151-152). Confronted with social and economic benefits of large families, Kotler and Roberto recommend that the agency explore other needs and position its social product as a satisfier of these needs. In the case of family planning, “the need it will satisfy is ‘to express one’s love to one’s life partner...[by] seeing that the wife is protected from the weakening effects of frequent pregnancies’” (Kotler and Roberto, 1989, 152). Thus, in fact, social marketers do not necessarily seek to meet the needs of their target market; they manipulate other needs or desires which are not necessarily related to their organizational objectives.

This raises a question about just whose needs social products are designed to satisfy. In *Social Marketing*, Kotler and Roberto appear to discuss the development of social products primarily in terms the needs of target adopters: “the tasks are twofold: to identify the distinctive needs of target adopters that a specific social product can satisfy and determine how to present the defined product effectively to the target adopters” (Kotler and Roberto, 1989, 139). It is worth noting Kotler and Roberto’s choice of words. They do not say the goal is to understand adopters’ needs and develop products to satisfy them, but to understand what needs a social product *can* satisfy. Here Kotler and Roberto are conflating the needs of the target adopter with the goals of the social marketing organization. If social products are the beliefs, attitudes, values or behaviours that the promoters of the social cause would like certain individuals or institutions to adopt, they are defined by the objectives or values of the social marketing organization. On the other hand, and consonant with marketing principles, social products are defined to meet the needs of the market (Kotler and Roberto, 1989, 140). Kotler and Roberto’s use of the word “need” to signify

both the goals of the social marketer and the needs of the consumer is perhaps more than just a lack of clarity. It allows the social marketer to use similar justifications that commercial marketers advance when criticized for certain practices or for making certain products available to the public: they are merely meeting public needs. Kotler and Roberto's confusing use of the term "needs" also helps social marketers evade questions that may arise about implications of attitudinal and behavioural change and the necessary application of social power required to achieve it. In contrast, Joyce and Morris (1990) make the distinction between customer needs and the goals of the social marketing organization quite clearly:

The desire to identify and satisfy customer needs is the driving force that leads an organization to develop a co-ordinated set of product, price, promotion, and distribution programs. Those who market social products attempt to *convince people that they have certain needs they may not acknowledge*, and should engage in behaviours they currently resist. Social marketers are, in general, more concerned with long-term societal welfare than with satisfying a particular customer at a given point in time (Joyce and Morris, 1990, 102, emphasis mine).

This clearly suggests that despite social marketing theorists' claims of methodological neutrality (Kotler and Roberto, 1989, 18), the theory is in fact much more overtly ideological than its commercial counterpart. For commercial marketers, needs are opportunities to provide a product and service and, with luck, turn a profit. Social marketers, meanwhile, see needs as an opportunity to advance a vision of society.

While the shortcomings of social marketers' understanding of needs are diverse and extensive, it is perhaps worth noting a common thread that runs through the problematic. To a certain extent, the key difficulties with the theory turn on an absence of social

processes and dynamics. Seeing needs as *a priori* states neglects the possibility that demand is shaped by social circumstance and relations. Defining needs in terms of desired rather than extant behaviour similarly ignores the role of a complex social setting in determining demand. Conflating needs with desires occurs because desire is a more social concept which is underplayed in social marketing's view of the subject as an abstract rational actor. Finally, confusing the needs of target adopters with the goals of the social marketing organization seems to deliberately avoid questions of power, which, at their core, are questions about social relations and relative social positions.

Marketing concepts and absences

Both Kotler and Roberto and Fine move quickly from discussing needs to designing products to meet them. In many instances, however, these social products turn out not to be products in the usual sense of the term but negative products: non-smoking, not drinking and driving and not taking drugs are the absences promoted by many social change campaigns. Other social products, such as family planning, are not negative in that they imply an absence of a behaviour or attitude, but they are conceptual rather than tangible. Kotler and Roberto address the distinction between tangible and intangible products by suggesting that social marketers should attempt to devise a tangible "substitute" product that helps motivate people to abandon ideas, attitudes and behaviours and adopt those the social marketer is promoting (Kotler and Roberto, 1989, 152). Examples of substitute products mentioned by Kotler and Roberto include charcoal cigarette filters, methadone clinics, smoking-cessation clinics, condoms and other birth control methods. These

substitute products can then become the focus of marketing activities such as branding, positioning, distribution, promotion and pricing.

In practice, however, the development of a tangible substitute product may not be feasible, or particularly desirable. For example, while low-tar cigarettes may be less harmful to health than high-tar cigarettes, marketing these to children and adolescents would not necessarily help reduce smoking incidence. When social marketing campaigns seek to engender new practices, such as charitable giving, tangible products also make little sense. Kotler and Roberto cite examples of social marketing campaigns where no tangible product is used, such as a Swedish campaign to change driving habits (Kotler and Roberto, 1989, 167). In these cases, it seems that communications to promote social change assume the role of the product. In discussing how to distribute intangible products, Kotler and Roberto imply a correspondence between the products and messages about it: "Advertising researchers refer to mass communication media as being engaged in 'message distribution' or 'message delivery.' Therefore, the media are the prime channels for marketing and distributing intangible social products" (Kotler and Roberto, 1989, 167). If the message and the product are one and the same, there seems to be little practical use for the product metaphor and the idea of exchange, without which the distinctiveness of social marketing from other approaches comes into question.

The negative and conceptual products of social marketing produce specific marketing challenges with respect to branding, distributing and pricing.¹² Kotler and Roberto refer to branding only in reference to a tangible social product (Kotler and Roberto, 1989, 153). This consists primarily of giving the product a brand name which should be an “integral reinforcer of the product concept” that, along with packaging, will define the product’s benefits, features and distinguish it from competitors (Kotler and Roberto, 1989, 153). Without a physical presence, it is difficult to give a product a distinct identity in the minds of consumers. For example, point-of-purchase displays of colourful cigarette packages serve as a reminder of the cigarette to anyone shopping at a convenience store. Because it does not enjoy physical properties, the conceptual negative product of “non-smoking” is at a competitive disadvantage. Unfortunately, neither Kotler and Roberto, nor Fine, elaborate on the marketing advantages of a brand or speculate on how brand image works in the consumption process. This is consistent with seeing products merely as utility-providers for socially abstracted consumers; if consumers are motivated by needs that can be met by the product, brand identity truly amounts to little more than “dressing up” the product (Kotler and Roberto, 1989, 139).

This treatment of branding is surprisingly simplistic given Kotler and Roberto’s marketing expertise. One need only consider the fierce brand loyalty given to different types of beer that are, in terms of their features, distribution and pricing, virtually identical, to begin to appreciate the importance of brand image in the commercial marketplace. One role of the

¹² Negative products also have implications for promotion and communication. These will be discussed in the subsequent chapter.

brand, as we shall see shortly, is not to distinguish the features of product as much as its consumers. As such, branding is a highly social activity and involves cultural meaning and its transfer. Because Kotler and Roberto abstract the individual, these concepts are under-emphasized. Not insignificantly, branding is a critical marketing element for producers of the very products that two prominent types of social marketing campaigns compete against: alcohol and cigarettes. Kotler and Roberto, and Fine, however, offer little advice on how an anti-tobacco campaign would address the brand status of a Marlboro cigarette, whose sales have continued to rise in the United States even while the number of smokers has declined (Elliot, 1995, 11). To their credit, social marketing writers do recognize that without a tangible product base, the image of the social marketing agency comes into play in the purchase decision. Kotler and Roberto argue that when a “a product or message communicating a product arises from a campaign or campaign staff that enjoys great credibility and respect, the likelihood that the product will be adopted is greatly increased” (Kotler and Roberto, 1989, 154). Thus the social marketing organization should strive to increase its expertise, trustworthiness and likability among target adopters (Kotler and Roberto, 1989, 155). This observation suggests that the social product and the utility it provides are not the only factors to consider in promoting social change. However, it does not amount to an analysis of the social aspects of consumption.

Distributing negative and conceptual products is also more difficult to manage than with tangible products. A cigarette manufacturer, brewer or distiller (or drug dealer) knows exactly how well their product is moving by simply tracking physical inventory. If sales are slipping, the marketer can immediately adjust other elements of the marketing mix – price,

promotion, advertising, personal sales – in an attempt to compensate. Social marketers promoting concepts or ‘negative behaviours’ such as not smoking, cannot determine the effectiveness of their activities without costly, time-consuming and often inexact or ambiguous primary research. For example, to determine whether or not smoking incidence is decreasing among a target segment of the population, large-scale studies are required over a number of years. Similar research is required to determine exposure and reaction to campaign messages.

For traditional commercial marketers, price is another important variable in the marketing mix. By adjusting price, the commercial marketer can differentiate products, influence competitive relations and appeal to various consumer segments, while at the same time maximizing profit (Sommers, 1989, 298). For social marketers, the absence of a tangible product makes pricing more difficult. While social products are often without monetary prices, social marketing theorists generally agree that the adoption of a belief, attitude or behaviour is not without cost to the consumer or adopter in terms of time costs and perceived risks (Kotler and Roberto, 1989, 181; Joyce and Morris, 1990, 105). The value of physical products is often at least partly determined by their physical properties, raw materials and manufacturing process (e.g. premium vs. regular beer). The worth of conceptual products, however, rests purely on the perception of their value by the buyer. Furthermore, the buyer must assess the price on faith of some potentially indeterminate future benefit of adopting the product as opposed to acquiring, at the very least, the value inherent in a tangible products physical qualities (Joyce and Morris, 1990, 104; Rangan, Sohel and Sandberg, 1996, 44). This difficulty is particularly resonant in anti-smoking

social marketing campaigns which attempt to convince teen-agers not to smoke. Because the health benefits of not smoking are typically realised in later adulthood, questions such as “Will not taking up smoking really make me live longer and feel better?” and “Why should I worry about smoking? After all, I could be hit by a bus or die of a heart attack anyway?” are frequently encountered by Health Canada and other anti-tobacco marketers must address (Hazel, August 16, 1996). While Kotler and Roberto suggest that in attempts to “de-market” unhealthy behaviours such as cigarette smoking, the price of the cigarette can be raised using regulatory means (Kotler and Roberto, 1989, 176-177), this clearly undermines the notion of a free exchange on which marketing theory and practice are premised: “For an exchange to occur... the parties must be involved voluntarily... and each party must believe it will benefit from the exchange” (Sommers, 1989, 5).

In their analysis of social pricing, Joyce and Morris outline other important issues that reveal the limitations of traditional pricing theory (and thus marketing theory) in the diffusion of social “products” (Joyce and Morris, 1990,105). First and foremost perhaps is that social prices differ for each target adopter (Joyce and Morris, 1990, 104-105). In fact, what some people perceive to be a cost (the time required to give blood) others may see as a “utility-generating benefit” or opportunity (Joyce and Morris, 1990, 105). Standardized monetary prices for tangible goods allow consumers to make rational decisions about whether or not to purchase a product. Joyce and Morris cite the example of a consumer who can determine how far a gallon of gasoline will permit a car driver to travel and the calculation of that utility in relation to the monetary price of the gas. Combined with the future realization benefits of social products, the lack of a standard price for a social product

such as car pooling makes assessing benefits quantitatively more difficult: “The same individual, when asked to carpool two days a week, will see little direct personal benefit in helping reduce atmospheric pollution” (Joyce and Morris, 1990, 105). Ultimately, the lack of a standardized price, and intangible or uncertain benefits, mean that social marketers have little impact over non-monetary prices (Joyce and Morris, 1990, 105). How can prices be lowered or raised to predictable effect if they differ for each individual? The answer, according to Kotler and Roberto, and Joyce and Morris, is to attempt to minimize the time and perceived risks of adoption. While time and effort costs, if they are relevant, can be managed through the organization of the social marketing campaign (e.g. developing a diffuse, multi-channel system for the distribution of condoms, rather than a centralized, hard to reach site), “psychic” costs or perceived risks are often managed through communications. Kotler and Roberto suggest that managing risks involves communicating psychological benefits of adopting a product, collecting and disseminating “endorsements from credible sources that reduce the potential stigma or embarrassment of adopting a product,” and, where physical risks are perceived, to “solicit [and communicate] seals of approval from authoritative institutions” (Kotler and Roberto, 1989, 182).

Given the difficulties that social products raise for the marketing tactics of branding, packaging, distribution and pricing, one might expect that in practice, the marketing of social products is fraught with problems. The next section briefly examines Health Canada’s attempts to market non-smoking according to the precepts of a social product as outlined by Kotler and Roberto and Fine. While Health Canada considered this approach

successful, an analysis of its change in social marketing strategy shows that, for all intents and purposes, the organization abandoned the metaphor of the social product.

Moving beyond the theory: marketing non-smoking

The conceptual and practical difficulties of negative and intangible social products are evident in how Health Canada has conducted anti-tobacco social marketing campaigns. For two departmental officials interviewed for this project, the intangibility of their product was what distinguished social marketing from its commercial form: “We’re marketing beliefs, attitudes and behaviours. That’s the difference between marketing and social marketing. Marketing always has a product and social marketing doesn’t” (Ladouceur, August 21, 1996). When asked whether the social product was central to their approach, officials instead felt that their role was to deliver credible messages to make people aware of the health risks of smoking and to convince them to act on that knowledge (Hazel, August 21, 1996). Whether this was entirely consistent with the approach outlined by Kotler and Roberto seemed to be irrelevant. “Theory is an interesting topic, but the reality is beyond the theory.... Do we live and breathe by [social marketing theory]? No... We’re not convinced that it really applies. We’ve got to be convinced.” (Ladouceur, August 21, 1996). Instead, Health Canada officials tend to use the term social marketing to describe their approach not so much because they are concerned with an exchange process as because the department uses extensive audience research to design and deliver messages

and because it uses the marketing concepts of market segmentation and positioning in its campaigns (Mintz, 1991).¹³

In fact, there has been a strategic change in the Department's non-smoking programs away from the idea of a social product. In its "Break Free" non-smoking campaign (1985-1993), Health Canada actively tried to promote non-smoking behaviour to various target groups using "messages that are positive and upbeat, focusing on building self-esteem and avoiding victim-blaming" (McKim, 1994, 2). This direct approach to promoting non-smoking lifestyles and attempting to persuade smokers to abandon the habit fits neatly within Kotler and Roberto's theoretical perspective of the social product: the social product consists of the beliefs, attitudes and awareness that the social change agent is trying to promote. While Health Canada argued its "Break Free" campaign was successful in reducing tobacco use among target groups (Health Canada, 1993, 36), it nevertheless shifted its strategy to an indirect approach to reducing demand for tobacco. Rather than use marketing campaigns to persuade target groups to avoid or abandon cigarettes, Health Canada officials decided to create public acceptance of more coercive approaches to tobacco "demand reduction." As one official summarized, "our job is to create the right environment for the issues that make people accept the legislation or the regulation" (Hazel, August 21, 1996). This approach is reflected in a strategy document prepared for Health Canada that summarized the main objective of the strategy as moving "tobacco from a 'personal choice' to a 'public health' (including health, economic and environment) issue, thereby increasing motivation for

¹³ There are also organizational reasons for the adoption of the social marketing label which will be explored in Chapter 4.

quitting/abstaining, and increasing support for tougher public measure against tobacco use” (McKim, 1994, 16). Creative executions of this strategy were to include advertisements that focused on the health effects of environmental tobacco smoke on children and convince “opinion leaders about... the importance of measures to protect the health of non-smokers” (McKim, 1994, 16-17).

This strategic shift also signalled a recognition of the role of branding. Although the Department attempted to create a positive image for non-smoking with its “Break Free” campaign, the inherent difficulties of branding an intangible and negative concept proved hard to surmount. Advertising for the “Break Free” campaign included television spots that used conventions of youth-oriented music videos to try to create an upbeat view of non-smoking.¹⁴ Health Canada officials recognized, however, that the target audience of 11-17 year olds did not respond as well as was hoped because “teens [saw] this as specifically targeted to them. They saw it as the government telling them what to do” (Hazel, August 16, 1996). Consequently, the campaign’s communications were becoming associated with a paternalistic, authoritative perception of the government. As part of its new strategy, Health Canada tried to re-position the image of cigarettes, cigarette manufacturers and retailers. Rather than focusing on branding the negative product of non-smoking, the new strategy and some of its creative attempt to work against the image of cigarettes. Three of the overall communications objectives for the campaign explicitly address the image of cigarettes and those who market them. Specifically, the strategy was designed to increase

¹⁴ These included the use of pop-singer Luba in an ersatz “Break Free” music video and the borrowing of plot formats and special effects in an (in)famous morphing cigarette television advertisements.

“recognition of the toxic nature of tobacco products; recognition of the tobacco industry’s pro-profit, anti-health activities... [and] to increase awareness about the issue of access to tobacco by minors” (McKim, 1994, 16).

In this new approach Health Canada officials had begun to recognize, even if they did not explicitly say so, that the product and exchange metaphors at the centre of social marketing theory were limited and that social attitudes and meanings were fundamental to the Department’s social change objectives. Combined with Health Canada’s recognition that regulatory and legislative restrictions against tobacco were required, this strategic shift suggests that treating “non-smoking” as a need-satisfying product considered in economic terms within a free market may be ineffective in actually reducing smoking prevalence. Joyce and Morris, themselves social marketing theorists, also question the relevance of approaching social change communications within the economic framework of a market. Although they do not advocate abandoning the concept of exchange in social change campaigns, Joyce and Morris recognize that its application is problematic. The fundamental issue, they imply, is that non-economic social behaviour and economic exchange behaviour are of a different order:

The question is, does some type of marketplace exist for social goods... It is sometimes difficult to find in a social marketplace such phenomena as consumer needs and wants, a profit motive, an efficient price mechanism, forces of competition (supply), and a set of utility-maximizing consumers (demand) (Joyce and Morris, 1990, 103).

The next section of this chapter posits new ways of approaching this problem by providing theoretical bases for understanding products and consumption as social phenomena and suggesting how these approaches might inform social marketing theory and practice.

The social nature of products and consumption

As shown earlier, some of the shortcomings of social marketers' conception of products derive directly from assumptions about social change and motivation. Because social marketers tend to atomize subjects from their social surroundings, a series of abstracted material or psychological needs and impulses are posited as key behavioural motivators. As the mechanism to fulfil these needs and shape the behaviour of others to conform with what the "social change agent" considers desirable, social products also tend to be abstracted from their social environments. There are, however, other theories of products and consumption that can contribute to a critique of social marketing by identifying different roles for products other than the satisfaction of material utility. As Lunt and Livingstone (1992) note in their review of consumption theories, there is no dominant view of consumption but several theories that highlight the cultural and social elements of consumption (Lunt and Livingstone, 1992, 12-13). Rather than examine each major theory, this essay will summarize elements of writings by Schudson (1984), Leiss, Kline and Jhally (1985), Appadurai (1986), McCracken (1990) and Baudrillard (1988) that focus on the connections among consumers, products and social life. These writings about product-consumer relations fall primarily into what Lunt and Livingstone classify as theories on the

social nature of commodities and mass consumption as social activity (Lunt and Livingstone, 1992, 14, 20). Because each of these writers focuses on social aspects of the product, their theories serve to complexify the simple notion of products as need satisfiers expounded by social marketing theorists. By showing that needs are culturally constituted, that products play a role in shaping social relations and establishing and conveying cultural meaning, these theories help expand the critique of social marketing as well as provide an alternative view of the role of social products can play in social change communications campaigns.

A common point among the following approaches is an insistence that needs are not pre-existing states and must be analyzed socially in order to provide theoretical insights to behaviour. Michael Schudson, for example, argues that needs are both social and relative. Even in so-called primitive societies, significant planning and activity are devoted to the cultivation and satisfaction of social needs (Schudson, 1984, 131). Schudson examines eating rituals to show that in virtually every society, the satisfaction of hunger tends to consist of more than addressing human's biological requirements for calories and nutrients. Eating is also socially coded and organized in that it typically requires adherence to certain social conventions such as the speed at which one eats, removing of hats, and culturally specific table manners (Schudson, 1984, 131-132). He concludes that "for the purposes of social analysis, the notion that there are basic biological needs that can be separated from artificial and created needs does not make good sense. All needs are socially constructed in all human societies" (Schudson, 1984, 132). Rather than material utility, what people seek through their consumption behaviour, Schudson argues, are the elements to be a person, or

to “live a social life” (Schudson, 1984, 132). And because needs are social, the objects through which needs are satisfied should be seen not merely from the perspective of the “intentional actions of individuals operating in their own material self-interest” (Schudson, 1984, 135). Similarly, Leiss, Kline and Jhally argue that consumption “is always a social process” in which choosing and using goods helps orient consumers to what others are doing (Leiss, Kline, Jhally, 1985, 295). Consumption provides a basis for “intersubjective comparisons” among individuals that allow people to make comparative judgments about social status and relative social position (Leiss, Kline, Jhally, 1985, 296).

Schudson analyzes gift-giving to show that the gift both symbolizes social relationships, and suggests that people assess their material conditions in terms of relative social standards (Schudson, 1984, 145). These observations suggest that goods or products play an important role in social relations and in establishing relative social position. For social marketing, this implies that needs should be understood within a social context, and not merely in relation to an individual: where Kotler and Roberto examine cigarettes as satisfying an individual’s need to relax, a social marketer using Schudson’s framework would inquire why relaxation is important to the smoker’s social context and his or her social relations.

Schudson and Leiss, Kline and Jhally, also chronicle, how, in the twentieth century, consumer goods became important to the sense of identity of increasingly socially and geographically mobile citizens. As industrialization and post-secondary education resulted in urbanization and increased mobility, many people were no longer able to root a sense of identity in family or neighbourhoods. The coincidental rise in the production of

standardized consumer goods provided “symbols that people use[d] as maps for charting a complex and uncertain world” (Schudson, 1984, 155; see also 155; Leiss, Kline, Jhally, 65). Leiss, Kline and Jhally, note however, that increased productive capacities created a need for industrialists to “move the goods cascading off their assembly lines” (Leiss, Kline, Jhally, 65). The emergence of brand-name goods, along with fashion, provided an emerging class of consumers with new ways of demarcating social space, time and as a result, their own sense of identity.

Schudson observes, however, that the identity argument is not sufficient to explain the appeal of many brand name goods. While some play a role in consumers’ sense of identity, other brand names, such as Macdonald’s or Coca Cola do not (Schudson, 1984, 158). From a marketing perspective, these brand names provide a measure of reliability and risk-reduction. They may also play a cultural role by providing provide common cultural symbols which serve as reference points for participants in a culture:

Enjoyment of physical consumption is only part of the service yielded by goods; the other part is the enjoyment of sharing names... the anthropological argument insists that by far the greater part of utility is yielded... in sharing names that men have learned and graded. This is culture” (Douglas, quoted in Schudson, 1984, 160).

Thus, brands serve not only identity needs but the need for cultural meaning. As McCracken observes, objects substantiate cultural categories (time, space, age, person, etc.) by which people use to make distinctions and sense of, natural and social phenomena:

Because they are a vital, visible record of cultural meaning that is otherwise intangible...[g]oods are an opportunity to make culture material. Like any other species of material culture, they permit the public, visual discrimination of

culturally specified categories by encoding these categories in the form of a set of distinctions of their own (McCracken, 1990, 75).

This does not occur through mere purchase and passive possession. Consumers engage in several types of rituals in which meaning is “transferred” from the object to the consumer. Exchange rituals, where objects are given as gifts are also the potential sites for the transfer of cultural meanings because the recipient of the gift is also “the intended recipient of the symbolic properties that the gift contains. For instance, the woman who receives a particular kind of dress is also made the recipient of a particular concept of herself as a woman” (McCracken, 1990, 84). While the gift giver here plays a strong role in determining which meaning is transferred from the object to the person, in other rituals, the possessor or consumer plays a more active role in this process. For example, the consumer personalizes a product by establishing its place within a constellation of consumer goods already in his or her possession (McCracken, 1990, 85-86). By shaping and continuously changing the patterns of their possessions, consumers alter and re-arrange cultural categories and hence the meaning that goods have for themselves and, where the goods are displayed, to others. Another ritual consists of the activities required to maintain, personalize and even enhance the possessions. One obvious grooming ritual employed particularly by young men – washing, waxing and detailing a car – serves to transfer meaning from the possession to the possessor (McCracken, 1990, 86). Finally, consumers can divest themselves of meanings that belonged to previous owners or to “erase the

meaning that has been invested in the good by association” before disposing of the item (McCracken, 1990, 87).¹⁵

My intent in introducing the arguments of Schudson, McCracken and Leiss, Kline and Jhally, is not to suggest that utility be rejected as a conceptual framework for social marketing’s approach to the analysis of “target adopter” behaviour or the development of social products. It is instead to argue that utility so-conceived is far too narrow a concept on which to undertake these activities. By providing a framework for understanding the social role of products and their provision of meaning, I suggest that the concept of a product be extended to designate a social object that has appeal by standing for and shaping social interactions and by providing a nexus for the creation and circulation of cultural meaning. As Leiss, Kline and Jhally summarize their key argument, “[a]dvertising is not just a business expenditure.. but is rather an integral part of modern culture. Its creations appropriate and transform a vast range of symbols and ideas.. [and] recycle cultural models and references back through the networks of social interactions” (Leiss, Kline, Jhally, 1985, 5). This basic theoretical extension in turn permits the development of social marketing practices that might overcome some of the issues and shortcomings discussed earlier. How

¹⁵ While McCracken’s objective is to argue that these observable behaviours can be interpreted as strategies where cultural meaning invested in objects is transferred to their owners, it is worth noting that some contemporary marketing practice seems to confirm his perspective. Recently, some manufacturers have begun to provide consumption rituals as part of the package they are selling. The car manufacturer Saturn, for example, has promoted Saturn owner reunions and gatherings that provide consumers with ready-made rituals in which they can participate. Lifestyle beer television ads that construct situations such as long weekends in which friends engage in “extreme” sports, camp out and drink the product could be similarly interpreted. Within McCracken’s framework, this might be more than a marketing tactic aimed at merely moving more products. Organizing and structuring these rituals for consumers might also be seen as a strategy by the manufacturer to maintain brand identity by exerting some measure of control, not only over how its products are perceived, but how they are used.

this might work in social marketing campaigns aimed at curbing smoking is suggested in the following analysis of the cultural role of the cigarette.

Analyzing cigarettes and smoking in terms of social relations and a meaning-producing and circulating activity offers a more complex and realistic appraisal of the behaviour than a straightforward appeal to sensory pleasures and utility. Goods can play a paradoxical role in change: they are both symbols of social change and conservative agents which preserve continuity (McCracken, 1990, 132-136). Goods such as clothing can be used by groups promoting social change (such as hippies or punks) to defy cultural conventions – and the meanings or principles of these conventions. When these groups use consumer goods to declare their difference:

the code they use renders them comprehensible to the rest of society and assimilable within a larger set of cultural categories. Radical groups may express their protest in the language of goods but in doing so they inevitably create messages that all can read. The act of protest is finally an act of participation in a set of shared symbols and meanings... the “act” of protest becomes an act of rhetorical conformity” (McCracken, 1990, 133-134).

Cigarettes, for example, have shown a remarkable resilience in communicating cultural distinctions between men and women in that they have been repeatedly re-defined to mark this distinction even as health concerns have arisen to erase these distinctions (McCracken, 1990, 135). Initially, cigarettes helped define the distinction between men and women in that men smoked and women did not. When women began to smoke, “this symbolism was compromised” (McCracken, 1990, 135). The distinction, however, was re-established with the introduction to the market of filter cigarettes (women) and non-filter brands (men). As

rising health concerns resulted in men using filter cigarettes, the distinction was again re-established with the introduction of low-tar cigarettes for women. However, as men also moved to lighter brands, “physical properties no longer could be used to differentiate cigarettes according to gender and the object-code resorted to image-differences alone.” (McCracken, 1990, 134). While McCracken refers to the activities of the “object-code” in responding to social change, marketers clearly had a role in the development and successful introduction of new products (filter cigarettes, light and extra-light cigarettes, and so-called women’s brands such as Virginia Slims). Without this persistent and inventive marketing, the cigarette would not have maintained its ability to communicate and reinforce male-female distinctions.

In response to anti-smoking campaigns and widespread acknowledgement of their health risks, cigarettes now serve as a distinction between smokers and non-smokers of either sex. It is interesting to note how some cigarette marketers now use the regulatory restrictions on smoking - which are intended to discourage the practice - to promote it. An advertisement for Benson and Hedges cigarettes (see Appendix A), shows smokers (both men and women) smoking on the top of the Statue of Liberty. The ad clearly defines the smokers – resilient, inventive and fun-loving, if risk-averse – in opposition to non-smokers (who, in this ad, remain unseen, presumably within the “safety” of the observation deck). While these smokers of extra-long 100 mm cigarettes may have to go to extra “lengths” to light-up, in so doing they are (quite literally) reaching new heights in the classic American tradition of personal freedom. If cigarettes now serve to distinguish smokers from non-smokers, within the former group, brands still connote distinctions of masculinity, tastes

and styles. Virginia Slims still appeal to a sense of female liberation and independence, Marlboro is still associated with the wild frontier while Camel cigarettes are now being positioned to reflect a sense of hip urban danger and mystery (see Appendix A). By understanding that cigarettes, in addition to providing utility in the form of taste, relaxation, etc., also mark social distinctions, social marketers can better appreciate the value of cigarettes to smokers and re-assess what their own anti-smoking campaigns are trying to accomplish. Rather than search for social products that meet utility needs, social marketing of anti-smoking campaigns becomes a competition over the meaning of cigarettes as a marker of social distinctions. From this perspective, social marketers can appreciate that anti-smoking campaigns, while trying to shift the role of cigarettes from markers of sex, have merely replaced them with a perhaps more fundamental distinction of smoker/non-smoker.

Marketing and economic systems

Before proceeding to a discussion of the communication theory employed by the major social marketing writers, I would like to introduce Baudrillard's discussion of needs and objects as a potential framework for understanding social marketing in terms of social values. Baudrillard's analysis further extends the critique of social marketing by illuminating the issue of whose needs a social product serves. In *Consumer Society*, Baudrillard critiques the underlying model of consumption used by classical economics as a tautological fable. The argument of needs and their satisfaction, Baudrillard claims, is

based on “the mythological sequence of the fable: a man, ‘endowed’ with needs which ‘direct’ him towards objects that ‘give’ him satisfaction” (Baudrillard, 1988, 35). Man, however, is never really satisfied, claims Baudrillard, and the fable has little explanatory power: “‘I buy this because I need it’ is equivalent to the claim that fire burns because of its phlogistic essence” (Baudrillard, 1988, 44). Baudrillard also rejects psychological and sociological views of needs, such as the one put forth by Schudson. Although these later two approaches complexify the economistic concept of rational utility into models of motivation and instinct or the social construction of needs through forces such as peer pressure, conformity or social competition, they remain tautological. The postulate of formal rationality, which in economics determined the individual’s relation to objects, is simply transferred to the relation of the individual to the group (Baudrillard, 1988, 37). Instead, Baudrillard argues that needs must be understood as a system determined in turn by the system of economic production:

By a system of needs we mean to imply that needs are not produced one at a time, in relation to their respective objects. Needs are produced as a force of consumption, and as a general potential reserve within the larger framework of productive forces (Baudrillard, 1988, 42).

For Baudrillard, the system of needs is related to, indeed is inseparable from, advanced technological, machine-based production, the “rational system of investment and [monetary] circulation” and the “abstract and systematized” wage-labour force (Baudrillard, 1988, 42). In this view, needs and consumption are “an organized extension of productive forces” (Baudrillard, 1988, 43)¹⁶.

While Baudrillard's argument here seems to deny explanatory potential for considering needs and desire as a relationship between individuals and objects other than from a larger perspective of systemic production and consumption, it does advance a critique of social marketing by providing a framework for placing social marketing campaigns within a broader political and ideological context. If commercial marketing consists of the activities which seek to structure and channel a system of needs to the requirements of a system of production, these activities acquire significance beyond the tactical promotion of product *x* or product *y*. They assume ideological and political significance in that they serve to reproduce and extend the system of production which in turn reflects the vested interests of capital, labour, etc.: "consumption is ... a complete system of values, with all that the term implies concerning group integration and social control" (Baudrillard, 1988, 49).

By analogy, social marketing can be seen as those activities which seek to structure attitudes and behaviour within larger systems of values. Perhaps cynically, if we accept Baudrillard's contention that consumption is not a "free" or "private" sphere of activity because it is systemically linked to an economic system of production, social marketing might be viewed as an attempt to structure those elements of social life that fall outside consumption within a value framework that supports the system of production. Like commercial marketing, social marketing becomes part of the rationalization of the productive forces of labour, capital and exchange. This is not difficult to see in some state-sponsored social marketing activities where the ultimate objectives are cast in terms of reducing state resources for health care or reduced labour force productivity (Ladouceur,

¹⁶ See also Leiss, Kline and Jhally, 1985, p.p. 51-59.

August 21, 1996). I will revisit the position of social marketing in relation to larger environmental forces in the final chapter of this thesis. For now, it remains to be seen how social marketing discourse promotes the social product. The next chapter examines the communications theories associated with social marketing to show how, like the idea of the social product, they are constrained by both the view of the person as a rational actor who responds mechanistically to sensory inputs and a failure to root communications within a complex social environment.

Chapter 3 – Social Marketing Communications

“The mass media fantasy is, in brief, that almost any given social or health problem can be adequately addressed if the right message could be communicated to the right people in just the right way at the right time.”

Lawrence Wallack

In the last chapter, I suggested that Baudrillard’s critique – that the idea of individual needs driving economic systems of production and consumption was a fable – also applied to the way social marketing writers such as Kotler and Roberto conceive the demand for social products. In this chapter, which explores social marketing communications, I will examine what Lawrence Wallack calls the “fantasy” of the mass media (Wallack, 1989, 353).

Wallack argues that most advances in public communications research have focused on developing better ways of understanding audience behaviour, developing messaging and media strategies and monitoring audience response (Wallack, 1989, 353). What most research has not done is critically examine the assumptions of media effects models on which public communications theory and practices are based. As a result, public communications theorists and practitioners continue to embrace the fantasy that mass media messaging, deployed correctly and in sufficient quantity, can in large part solve health and social problems (Wallack, 1989, 353).

To move beyond this fantasy it is first necessary to understand it. To that end, this chapter will examine how the communications process is conceptualized by various public communications writers, including Kotler and Roberto’s approach outlined in *Social Marketing*. The brief survey of communications literature will show that Kotler and Roberto’s approach is essentially indistinguishable from a mechanistic transmission model

such as those proposed by Harold Lasswell and Wilbur Schramm which theorize the communication process as a (primarily) one-way transmission of a static message to a passive audience of atomized individuals. In the process, I will attempt to engage some of the principal assumptions upon which these approaches rest to show how they are related to the theories of social change and motivation, examined in Chapter 1, that underwrite social marketing discourse.

The second part of the chapter introduces alternative approaches to communications theory which critically address some of the assumptions of media effects theories that inform most public communications and social marketing writing. I will also sketch out what these alternative approaches might mean for the development and conduct of public communications campaigns. Because real-life practice is more complex and complicated than theory, in the final part of the chapter, I suggest how, in some respects, the communications in Health Canada's anti-smoking campaigns are moving beyond the theoretical limits imposed by social marketing models of communication.

Literature Review

A review of social marketing and public communications literature reveals several approaches to public/social marketing communications. These range from "simple diffusion" approaches that rest on the idea that mass-media messages have a direct effect on the attitudes and behaviour of target adopters, to social learning theory, which argues that

mediated communications need to be supplemented with attempts to model desired behaviour and verbal praise for any adoption on the part of audience members.

Despite the plurality of approaches, most sociological writings on public communications are based on a “directive” theory of persuasive communications (McGuire, 1989, 44). The directive theory of persuasion is itself founded on Lasswell’s formulation of communication as source → message → channel → receiver → destination, or who says what, in which channel, to whom, with what effect (Lasswell, 1948, 84). Lasswell, while not suggesting that communications have universally predictable effects, advances a behaviourist analysis of effects by comparing the communication process to the stimulus-response that occurs within the central nervous system of “the physical organism and in the lower animal societies” (Lasswell, 1948, 88). Like Schramm’s theory that traced the effects of communications to “mediatory” responses within the central nervous system, Lasswell’s approach provided social scientists with a model that suggested that effects of mass communications on the individual could be predicted, if only the mediating properties of personality, attitudes, common referent systems and the content of the message could be controlled (Schramm, 1954, 7, 13).

In McGuire’s analysis of public communications, the first three of Lasswell’s five elements are re-termed “input” or “communication variables” which can be manipulated by the public communications campaign managers (McGuire, 1989, 44). The “output” or dependent variables consist of responses to the communication by individuals, ranging from

exposure to the formation of attitudes to short and long-term behaviour (McGuire, 1989, 45-51). From this perspective, communication effects are causally determined by the input variables and comprise a chain of cognitive (attending to and understanding the message), affective (the formation of favourable attitudes to the message) and behavioural effects (short and long-term actions based on the message) (McGuire, 1989, 48). As the following brief review of some major approaches to public communications theory will show, what distinguishes them is the emphasis placed on different channels and the degree to which they assume that mass-media communications are sufficient for achieving the desired cognitive, attitudinal and behavioural impacts.

Simple diffusion

Simple diffusion approaches to social change communications most closely mirror Lasswell's transmission model of mediated communications by modelling effects in a linear sequence in which the achievement of each type of effect is predicated on the previous output. In other words, behavioural effects occur only after communications have produced affective results in the subject, which in turn require cognitive impacts (McGuire, 1989, 49). Proponents of the simple diffusion model acknowledge that the effects become attenuated as they move through the hierarchy. While many audience members will be aware of a mediated communication, fewer will recall and understand the message, even fewer will form attitudes and fewer still create and act on behavioural intentions (Kotler and Roberto, 1989 191; McGuire, 1989, 49; Tanguay, 1992, 63).

Unfortunately, those who subscribe to this approach provide little explanation for this phenomenon. Kotler and Roberto, for example, seem to place responsibility for the success of each effect on the quality and quantity of the communication elements. The frequency or reach of an advertisement, for example, determines the number of audience members who are aware of it, while the quality of the “communication’s copy message” determines how many people develop a favourable attitude/image of [the] communicated product” (Kotler and Roberto, 1989, 192). Achieving behavioural impacts, then, requires success at each stage, which, from a practical perspective, is less likely than having one or two ‘malfunctions’ or weak links in the chain. While the observation may be truthful, it serves scant theoretical purpose, as it amounts to saying little more than effective communications (i.e. those that produce the desired effects) are those that work. Tanguay, meanwhile, suggests that external factors play a role in the effects model: “Social influences must be taken into account, because they modify the formation of attitudes... two social factors affect normative beliefs: what individuals believe others expect of them, and their tendency to comply with the standards of their reference groups” (Tanguay, 1992, 63). This complexifies the diffusion model and suggests that the communications-effects process does not occur in a vacuum. However, Tanguay does not describe communications are mediated by these factors. Rather, she merely argues that some approaches may not work as well as others with some target audiences.

Variations of this simple diffusion approach can be distinguished on the basis of alternative routes through the effects sequence. For example, some approaches advocate the adoption of short-term behaviour as a precursor to the formation of affective effects, or what might

be called the ‘try it, you’ll like it’ method (Kotler and Roberto, 1989, 193; McGuire, 1989, 51). Others posit that persuasion might partly result from communications that make “information already within the [target audience members’] cognitive systems more salient” (McGuire, 1989, 51).

Complex diffusion

A second type of public communication approach can be termed complex diffusion. Because many early mass media public communications campaigns premised on the diffusion model produced disappointing results (Wallack, 1989, 353), some social scientists adapted the simple diffusion model to emphasize the need for interpersonal communications as a synergistic reinforcement to the media campaign. In social marketing and publication communications literature, oft-cited examples of this approach are the Stanford Community studies on communication campaigns designed to prevent cardiovascular disease. In these studies, three demographically similar towns were the subject of a public communications experiment. In one town, residents were exposed to media messages about cardiovascular disease, its causes and suggested lifestyle changes that could alleviate risk. The second community received media interventions, directed mailings and interpersonal communication which supplemented the media campaign and provided audience members with additional strategies for reducing lifestyle risk factors such as poor diets, smoking, and lack of exercise. The third community, a control, received neither media nor interpersonal interventions.¹⁷ Results in personal risk factors assessed

¹⁷ For a discussion of the Stanford experiments, see Flora, *et al*, 1989, pp. 233-239.

after three years suggested a variety of cognitive and attitudinal effects, often higher among the media-plus interpersonal communication segments (Flora *et al*, 1989, 238-239). These findings have been used to underline the importance of combining mediated and interpersonal channels.¹⁸

From a theoretical perspective, complex diffusion approaches may resemble Paul Lazarsfeld's and Elihu Katz's "two-step flow" model. However, whereas Katz and Lazarsfeld theorized that personal influence plays a crucial, if not defining role in the shaping of public attitudes and behaviour (Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1955, 32), proponents of complex diffusion argue that both are important. Proponents of complex diffusion do not appear to elaborate a different persuasive mechanism than the one found simple diffusion. Again, messages are transmitted from the sender, through channels to the receiver, who decodes the messages, and forms concomitant beliefs, attitudes and intentions. Unlike simple diffusion models which tend to rely on mediated communications, complex diffusion stresses the need for interpersonal channels that may be more credible than impersonal mass media. However, whether delivered through the airwaves or in person, messages still "inoculate" the receiver and produce cognitive, then attitudinal and behavioural effects.

¹⁸ However, when it came to smoking, "overall smoking prevalence rates after three years were disappointing, with the intervention communities showing only slightly lower rates of smoking than the community that received no special programs "(McAlister *et al*, 1989, 292), suggesting that the addition of interpersonal communication had little impact in this area.

In fact, in some complex diffusion approaches, mediated communications appear to have even stronger behavioural impacts (albeit on a small segment of the audience) by inciting some audience members not only to act on the message, but to become channels for interpersonal communications with other audience members. Advertising should be aimed not at the “100% of the target audience, but the 2-3% of that audience who are opinion leaders and change agents, the influential and attentive public... who are motivated by a sense of idealism and social values. Eventually, these individuals and those they influence add up to a significant aggregate whole” (Alcalay and Taplin, 1989, 114).

The principal difference between complex and simple diffusion is that in the former, mass media and interpersonal channels tend to be directed towards different effects. Mass media communications work better at achieving cognitive and attitudinal effects, and interpersonal ones at convincing audience members to adopt desired behaviours (Rados, 1990, 140). Thus, other than the different emphasis accorded to different channels, complex diffusion approaches to public communications are based on the same fundamental transmission model.

Social learning theory

Social learning approaches to public communications emphasize the need for models that demonstrate appropriate behaviour (e.g. wearing seat belts) to target audiences. Like complex diffusion, social learning models advocate the use of several tactics, including both mass media and interpersonal communications. Social learning theory differs somewhat,

however, by articulating different mechanisms through which behavioural effects occur and by its explicit reference to role of social environment in the articulation of effects.

McAlister, *et al*, for example, argue that communications must play three distinct roles if they are to achieve complex and long-term behavioural effects (such as smoking cessation): First, communications must inform audiences about behaviours and their consequences; second, they must persuade audiences to adopt a desired behaviour; and third, they must provide training in skills necessary to the adoption of the desired behaviour (McAlister *et al*, 1989, 292).

McAlister *et al* suggest that the first two roles can be played effectively by mass media communications such as print, television or radio advertising (McAlister *et al*. 1989, 292). As they do not provide a different model of how mass media communications achieve these effects, the authors do not distinguish social learning from the basic transmission model that underlies the diffusion approach in the operation of cognitive and attitudinal effects. What social learning theorists do argue, however, is that providing information about a behaviour and its consequences (e.g. smoking causes lung cancer) and shaping attitudes (e.g. smoking is a repulsive habit) are, by themselves, unlikely to lead to long-term adoption of the desired behaviour (e.g. smoking cessation). These are more likely to occur through training, which consists of modelling the desired behaviour, supporting efforts at performing the desired behaviour and verbally rewarding the adoption (McCalister *et al*, 1989, 299-300). Social learning theorists appear to go one step further than supporters of complex diffusion approaches in diminishing the role of mediated communications: while these are still

necessary and can have desired behavioural effects, they must be supplemented by social environments which support the desired behaviour: “New behaviour may be acquired from mediated communication (e.g. from television), but they will not be performed unless the environment is one in which those behaviours will be reinforced” (McAlister *et al*, 1989, 299). Consequently, McAlister advocates the creation of a supportive environment of interpersonal communications in which desired behaviours are modelled and reinforced in what resembles a basic stimulus-response theory of human behaviour: the desired behaviour is not likely to become entrenched unless it is reinforced through interpersonal communications, especially in the form of “verbal praise from significant others” (McAlister *et al*, 1989, 299-300).

Systems approaches

A fourth type of approach to social change communications could be called a systems approach. Systems approaches differ from simple and complex diffusion in that they place greater emphasis on environmental factors such as economic conditions, the availability of material and information resources, the physical environment and cultural habits. As Rice and Foote (1989) summarize in their work on evaluating public communications campaigns, the systems model shows:

that before any intervention, there exists a prior state (say, of the people, their family, their community, the environment, the economy, mortality and morbidity rates, sanitary conditions, nutritional levels and so on) that is the baseline to which ongoing and final evaluation measurements are compared, and constraints existing in the system that affect how the population interacts with the intervention (Rice and Foote, 1989, 155).

A systems approach to public communications requires the consideration of these factors when setting goals, planning and executing communications and evaluating campaigns. Using a systems approach to promote health practices in a developing agrarian society, for example, might result in a strategy that timed communications campaigns to peak in rainy seasons and ebb during the harvesting. This theory also considers practical, material difficulties faced by audience members. For example, a campaign aimed at improving hygiene would determine whether clean water was readily available before developing campaigns urging audience members to wash their hands.

Two features distinguish the systems approach from the transmission models at the heart of the diffusion approaches outlined above. First, this approach recognizes that constraints to the desired behavioural change may lie with structural environmental factors, rather than with unfettered choices of individuals (Rice and Foote, 1989, 160-161). In other words, systems theorists admit that achieving the desired social change may not merely be a matter of changing individual behaviours, as these are (in part) structurally determined. Second, the systems model described by Rice and Foote describes public communication as (somewhat) interactive. Rice and Foote acknowledge that the “socio/economic characteristics of audiences play a very important role in communication interventions” and sometimes speak of audiences interacting with the campaign (Rice and Foote, 1989, 155, 159, 162). However, their model still tends to rely on directive, transmission theories of communication. Like campaigns based on transmission models, Rice and Foote measure the efficacy of communication messages in terms of recall and outputs defined along the same causal cognition - attitude - behaviour chain (Rice and Foote, 1989, 163-162). To put

it simply, the systems approach still examines communications from the perspective of what they *do to* people.

Social marketing

As we have seen, social marketing approaches to social change tend to include elements other than communication. Communication (or promotion, to use social marketing terminology) is merely one part of social marketing's strategy. "Social advertising is simply the use of advertising media for a social purpose... Social marketing, on the other hand, deals with all four of the marketing variables... product, price, place and promotion" (Solomon, 1989, 88). In Kotler and Roberto's work there are examples of simple diffusion, complex diffusion, social learning approaches. Because Kotler and Roberto advocate approaches that focus on the needs and situations of the intended audience, their social marketing model sometimes resembles a systems approach, where the need to recognize and account for social and structural issues is acute. Despite their advocacy of flexible and multi-faceted approaches, social marketing writers such as Kotler and Roberto, Solomon, and Tanguay do not deviate significantly from the transmission model implicit in simple diffusion approaches when discussing the use of mass communications to promote social change.

Kotler and Roberto and others analyze mass media promotions within the transmission model as a "hierarchy of effects" that begins with awareness, moves through recall of the message, to a favourable attitude towards the message and its subject, to the development of

behavioural intentions through to acting on these intentions (Kotler and Roberto, 1989, 191; Tanguay, 1992, 61-62). The first effect in the model, awareness of the communication promoting the social product, is simply the result of being exposed to the message. Then follows recall, which according to Kotler and Roberto, is based on the "copy execution" of the message (Kotler and Roberto, 1989, 192). The next links in the effects 'chain' are the formation of favourable attitudes towards the social product, the formation of intentions to adopt it, and finally, behavioural change (Kotler and Roberto, 1989, 191). However, how these effects occur is largely unexplained. While *Social Marketing* discusses the use of emotional versus rational appeals and urges research into the media habits of the target audience (Kotler and Roberto, 1989, 195-202), the book does not actually present explanatory criteria for what constitutes effective communication. In other words, there is no discussion of the processes that move the target adopters through the chain of effects. While Kotler and Roberto suggest that the hierarchy of effects model itself answers the question: "How does mass communication inform and persuade?" (Kotler and Roberto, 1989, 191), this is disingenuous. The model merely elaborates several stages of effects that culminate in behavioural change. Kotler and Roberto do not explain *how* communication works; they simply assert that it does, through a process akin to inoculation.

It is important to note that Kotler and Roberto do not suggest that the diffusion of media messages will necessarily achieve desired social change, although they argue that mass-media campaigns can persuade and directly cause behavioural change by providing information (Kotler and Roberto, 1989, 9). Like complex diffusion approaches, Kotler and Roberto advocate a multi-channel communication strategy consisting of mass

communications, direct communication (e.g. direct mail, telemarketing) and interpersonal communications. What separates social marketing from other complex diffusion approaches is that what is being communicated is conceived of as a product, rather than merely an invocation or invitation to adopt an attitude or behaviour. As a product, it should offer a benefit to potential adopters. Consequently, the purpose of mass communication message is “to convey the superiority of the social product in satisfying the target adopter’s need” (Kotler and Roberto, 1989, 194). Thus, the persuasive mechanism of social marketing communications is ultimately one of rational self-interest: the desired behaviour is adopted because the audience member is convinced that it is in his or her best interest to do so.

A critique of mechanistic models of media effects

While several approaches to social change communications can be discerned in literature on public communications campaigns, most espouse a transmission model of communications in which a sender or social change agent creates and transmits messages through mass media (and in some cases direct and interpersonal) channels. These messages are received by audience members and decoded. The results of the process are discrete cognitive, attitudinal and (in most instances) behavioural effects. The different approaches to public communications campaigns vary not in that they propose different models of communication, *but the degree to which they suggest the model is sufficient in achieving intended behavioural effects.*

The transmission or hypodermic model of mass media effects persists in the literature despite evidence that programs based upon it often fail to have the intended behavioural effects (Wallack, 1989, 365). For example, many anti-drug initiatives in the United States in the mid-1980s relied on a simple diffusion approach, resting on the belief that heavy media buys of advertisements admonishing children and teenagers to “Just Say No” would result in a significant decline in the number of Americans using narcotics. The reasoning behind the campaigns closely matched the transmission model of media effects: if audience members were presented with information showing drug use was harmful and that abstinence was “cool,” children and teens would both apprehend the danger of narcotics, form favourable attitudes to being “drug-free” and resist opportunities to use them. To supplement the media program, organizers also used interpersonal channels to re-inforce the message to teenagers. While many of these communications campaigns were recalled by their target audiences and may have played a role in shaping their attitudes towards drugs, “they had little or no influence on whether and how often the children took drugs” (Rangan, Sohel and Sandberg, 1996, 47-48).

Faced with evidence of poor or insignificant results in changing social behaviour, public communications writers, rather than questioning the assumptions of the basic transmission model, have developed refinements such as the systems approaches, social learning and social marketing discussed above (Wallack, 1989, 354). Wallack argues that, in part, the attractiveness of the mass media as a cost-effective vehicle for reaching large audiences serves to perpetuate what he calls the “mass media fantasy” (Wallack, 1989, 354, 366). To improve the success of social change communications, Wallack suggests that the

assumptions of traditional approaches need to be made explicit and critiqued (Wallack, 1989, 353-354). The remainder of this section critically explores six principal features of the transmission model. By examining some of the model's assumptions, the discussion also suggests how theoretical weaknesses may contribute to campaigns that do not achieve their intended effects.

Feature #1 – The appropriate target of communications is the individual

One of the fundamental features of the transmission model is that the target of communications is the individual. The implicit assumption in these approaches is that if the effects of the communication are to be changes in individual knowledge, attitudes and behaviour, the locus of the problem or issue being addressed is the individual and his or her choices. Providing information about the consequences of behaviours such as smoking, or attempting to influence attitudes on drug use, assumes that the larger social problems being addressed are merely an aggregate of many individual problems. As Wallack remarks, the highly complex issue of drug use and abuse is reduced to the will of one individual to “just say no” (Wallack, 1989, 355). This feature is consonant with Kotler and Roberto's tendency, discussed in Chapter 1, to frame problems and their solutions, at the level of the individual. In practice, this feature results in campaigns that focus on individual choices and behaviour while ignoring “broader social and political environments” (Wallack, 1989, 356).

Feature #2 – The audience is abstracted from dynamic social environments

Consistent with the modernist social change theories examined in Chapter 1, the audience in the transmission model is abstracted from his or her social environment. Again, this does not mean that approaches based on this model do not examine audiences in terms of social dimensions such as demographics, psychographics and media behaviour. It means that advocates of the model tend *not* to see social location and interaction as *essential* in the audience's condition or response to the message. For example, in *Social Marketing*, there is little discussion of how individual variables come into play in the success or failure of the communication to achieve desired effects. McGuire, meanwhile, suggests that personality and life-style "variables" need to be considered when developing media campaigns, because these can be correlated with the likelihood of success with different audience segments: older children, for example, are less susceptible to mass-mediated messages than those in middle childhood (McGuire, 1989, 47). But the discussion of audience characteristics is not theoretically related to how messages are "decoded" and incorporated within the psychology or behaviour of the subject as much as they serve to help the sender refine his approach to targeting communications at different audience segments. In practical terms, this can result in an overt reliance on mass-media campaigns that do not consider the reception environment. When communications are pre-tested before general release, research tends to occur in specially designed focus group facilities in which unrelated audience members are shown materials and asked to comment on what they mean and the extent to which they agree or disagree with a series of propositions related to the intended effects of the communications (e.g. do you think you are more or less likely to smoke cigarettes after seeing this ad?). In these situations, subjects may express very different

opinions about the meaning and effects of communications materials than they might if, for example, they saw a television advertisement at home after school in the company of their friends.

Feature #3 – Information is a “magic bullet” that leads to cognitive, attitudinal and behavioural effects.

An important characteristic of the transmission model is that the receipt of information produces commensurate cognitive, attitudinal and behavioural effects. Again, this is consistent with the social change mechanisms adopted by Kotler and Roberto and other public communications writers analyzed in Chapter 1. The model assumes that receipt of information will lead to the formation of related attitudes which in turn produce behavioural intentions. The process is rational, linear and isolated: rational because it assumes that cognition, attitudes and behaviour should be consistent; linear because effects occur in a prescribed sequence or sequences; and isolated because it tends to disregard other social and structural influences on the subject. The failure of the transmission model to provide a defence of the commensurability of different categories of effect or a theoretically coherent explanation of either how or why information produces predictable cognitive, attitudinal or behavioural impacts is akin to abandoning the mechanism by which effects occur to a theoretical “black box”: information goes in one end and attitudes and behaviour emerge at the other. As Rados concedes, “no one knows how advertising works” (Rados, 1990, 143).

Wallack argues that the concept of information as stimulus results in campaigns whose solution to social problems “is to provide the individual with information to make the right

choices” (Wallack, 1989, 356). Health Canada’s senior official responsible for many of the department’s campaigns seems to recognize the possibility of a disjuncture between information, attitudes and behaviour: “It must also be made clear from the outset that the marketing of information *per se* does not necessarily lead to attitude of behaviour changes. Providing health information is no guarantee that the audience will listen” (Mintz, 1992, 27). In practical terms, however, Health Canada’s refinements to simple diffusion approaches are often attempts at finding better ways to get information to audience members. For example, audience research that suggested teens were wary of messages from authority figures (including government) resulted in Health Canada using the a pop-music singer to deliver non-smoking messages (Mintz, 1992, 33). While the channel may have changed, the basic premise that audience members would respond attitudinally and behaviourally, in predictable ways, to the transmission of information remained unchanged from previous approaches.

Feature #4 – The audience is a passive recipient of meaning

In the transmission model underlying most public communications writings, successful decoding of a message amounts to interpreting it as the sender intended. The audience is fed the information and plays little role in shaping or adapting the message: “Decoding is *the* process by which *the* recipient interprets the words and pictures and thus arrives at *the* meaning of the message” (Rados, 1990, 141, emphasis mine). Meaning pre-exists, and is not conceived as the result of an active process in which the audience members’ social environment, cultural experience are engaged to create meaning. For example, in McGuire’s discussion of the Lasswellian directive theory, the audience is conceived as a

target whose role in the communications process consists of receiving the public communications messages (or “attacks”) and gaining knowledge and changing attitudes and behaviour as a result (McGuire, 1989, 51). Consequently, the transmission or hypodermic model focuses on “what advertising does to people” rather than “what people do with advertising” (Lannon, 1985, 526).

In practical terms, this passive approach to the concept of reception can lead to serious consequences in the elaboration of effects. Health Canada, for instance, tested television commercials that attempted to portray tobacco companies that sponsored sports and artistic events as unscrupulous and complicit in health problems caused by their product. The advertisement featured equestrian contests, fireworks and a tennis match. The final frame pictured a funeral of someone who had died of smoking-related illness and featured a voice-over saying “Here are some of the many events brought to you by tobacco companies” (Hazel, August 16, 1996). While government officials thought the advertisement presented a straightforward message with an easily decipherable intended meaning, the results of pre-testing research showed that audiences created quite a different interpretation of the commercial. Instead of seeing the tobacco manufacturers’ negatively, research participants saw the federal government as hypocritical for attacking the industry for selling what the government deemed a legal product on which the federal government had recently reduced taxes. Furthermore, in a political environment in which the government was reducing social spending, audience members felt the entire campaign was misdirected. As one Health Canada official noted, “people were saying, instead of [spending our tax dollars] running these ads, why don’t you spend the money on the events instead?” (Hazel, August

16, 1996). A more overt attempt to subvert anti-smoking messages can be seen in the creation and distribution of stickers intended to cover the prominent health warnings on cigarette packages. These replicate the type style of Health Canada warnings that “Cigarettes are addictive,” “Smoking can kill you,” etc. with whimsical messages such as “Smoking eliminates male pattern baldness” or defences of smoking such as “It relaxes me... okay” (see Appendix A).

Models which assume messages are received unproblematically by a relatively passive audience can also have consequences for the style of communications produced. Because the receiver is accorded a minor role in the process, the social marketer may tend to produce communications that have straightforward and comparatively unimaginative creative treatments. If the meaning is contained in a linear mechanistic expression of the social product’s benefits (e.g. don’t smoke, your teeth will stay white), the creative component of a social marketing advertisements becomes just the window-dressing, rather than sensory material that audiences use to construct meaning. This runs the risk of failing to adequately brand a social product in relation to competing attitudes or behaviours: initiatives by major tobacco manufacturers to create brand images and loyalty for products such as Marlboro and Camel cigarettes have been so successful that industry analysts suggest that there would be few consequences for the sale of these cigarettes if manufacturers were forbidden to show them in advertisements. Instead, manufacturers could likely succeed by merely advertising the name (Canedy, 1997, D1, D5).

Feature #5 – Communication is primarily unidirectional

In the transmission model, most communication is necessarily one-way: a single or small group of organizations uses mass and directed media to reach a large number of individuals. Communication from the target adopters to the social change agent consist of pre- and post-campaign research studies, which are restricted in quantity (by operational budgets) and structure (formal research defines the channels in which data are received and, especially in quantitative surveys, the questions that are asked).

This unidirectionality makes the entire campaign susceptible to the bias of the social change agent, a bias that can impede the success of the communication by making the process irrelevant to the audience. According to Rangan, Sohel and Sandberg, a common pitfall of the bias occurring from one-way communications are campaigns that promote the mission of the social change organization, rather than address the needs and concerns of the intended audience (Rangan, Sohel and Sandberg, 1996, 54). This can be seen in the early efforts of the Canadian government in promoting smoking avoidance and cessation, where the main theme or “tag-line” of the campaign was “a generation of non-smokers.” While this may have been a compelling goal for health-policy officials, there was little reason to suspect Canadians even cared whether their country would produce a generation of non-smokers.

Another example of the bias of unidirectionality can be found in Health Canada’s subsequent anti-smoking campaign “Break Free.” Arguably, this campaign was more audience-centred than its predecessor in that it attempted to position non-smoking as a way of satisfying needs for “freedom.” Nevertheless, part of the campaign consisted of a ten-

minute documentary on the filming of the campaign's television commercials that was "widely circulated to junior and senior high schools throughout Canada" (Mintz, 1992, 37). Why Canadian youth would find this relevant is not elaborated in Health Canada's discussion of its strategy. Again, the campaign seemed to be having a one-way conversation, promoting its own activities, rather than listening to its target audience.

Feature #6 – There is no explicit discussion of power

A final important feature of the transmission or hypodermic model of communication is that its proponents fail to provide a self-reflexive discussion of the model's implications for power relations. It is not difficult to see that, if communication is chiefly one-way and receivers are conceived as passive recipients of information, in the dynamics of power relations, the receiver is clearly subordinate to the sender. This is significant if, as was suggested in Chapter 1, power and agency are relevant to the analysis of social behaviour. If behaviours and attitudes being tackled by social change agents, such as racism and drug and alcohol abuse, are in part responses to the experience of lack of social agency, the power relations created by the transmission model merely reinforce the subordinate position of the target adopter. By conceiving of the audience as a passive receiver rather than an active participant in a communications process, the model exacerbates rather than addresses the issue. This may in part account for the phenomenon of inattention, of the tendency of some audience members to opt out of a communications process in which they perceive themselves as being "talked at" by powerful individuals and institutions.

Alternative approaches

The preceding critique of the transmission model of communication begs an obvious question: are there other theories or models of communication that address the assumptions of the transmission model and suggest alternatives to building more theoretically robust approaches to social change communications? This section presents approaches to communication both from the margins of public communications sociology (Dervin, 1989; Davidson, 1992; Lannon, 1985) and from “culturalist” writers (Hall, 1980; Williamson, 1978; Hay, 1989; McCracken, 1990; Klein, 1993) who offer different accounts of the communications process and its effects. It is important to note from the outset that most of these writers are concerned not just with the effects of communication on the individual, but with the larger ideological implications of advertising and media in capitalist (and other) economies. However, the following review presents their approaches in more functionalist terms; that is, it focuses on how these writers theorize the immediate effects of communications on the subject. This is not to deny what they have to say about the role of communications in structuring power relations; rather it is merely to focus on the more limited scope of this project, namely, providing alternative models of communications which might be suggestive to public communications campaigns.

Sense-making

In her critique of public traditional public communications campaigns, Brenda Dervin proposes what might be called a uses and gratifications approach to the communication process. Dervin suggests that audiences are not merely passive recipients of information.

Instead, they are "sense-makers" who use public communications messages to help understand their world, especially at cognitive or emotional disjunctures (Dervin, 1989, 77-78). Dervin shifts the focus of the transmission model from effects *as impacts* on audiences' knowledge, attitudes and behaviour, to effects as the result of audiences *use* of communications. Audiences do not passively receive and react to these messages, rather they employ them, in combination with other information and past experiences, to achieve understanding and to choose courses of action:

The human moves cognitively through time-space using whatever sense he or she has already constructed based on personal as well as vicarious experiences. Given that life is inherently discontinuous, sense frequently runs out. A gap is identified. The human must build a bridge across the gap. In doing so, the human will answer questions, create ideas, and/or obtain resources. The situation that leads to the gap, the gap itself, the bridge, and even what the human does after crossing the bridge, are all best understood as constructions (Dervin, 1989, 77).

Thus, Dervin proposes a model that examines what audiences do *with* communications in the context of their lived experience, rather than one that more narrowly views what communications do *to* audiences. The notion of communication as a process in which both sender and receiver are active has specific implications for the development of public communications campaigns. Rather than "feed" audiences information about physical or social implications of a behaviour or attitude, it suggests that those conceiving campaigns need to address how audience members use information in their social settings. In practical terms, this may mean pre-campaign research that attempts to get audience members, in their own terms, to suggest how and why they look for information related to a particular issue (Dervin, 1989, 77). In an anti-smoking campaign for example, it may mean examining the cognitive discontinuities that arise in non-smoking/smoking choices and how both smokers

and non-smokers seek to overcome them. It also suggests communications strategies that are more dialogic and conversational, that social change organizations develop systems which allow audience members to communicate with each other as well as with the social change institution (Dervin, 1989, 82-83).

Decoding and Polysemy

While Dervin argues that audiences are active in the construction of meaning, this activity tends to amount to little more than selective interpretation. In other words, Dervin says audiences read mediated communications by filtering messages through their personal experiences, biases and perceptions (Dervin, 1989, 72, 80). Stuart Hall accounts for the 'misreading' of communications (e.g. Health Canada's experience with anti-tobacco sponsorship advertising) by arguing that meaning is created both by the encoder (analogous to the sender in the transmission model) and the decoder (the receiver) (Hall, 1980, 128-129). Where the transmission model suggests that the relationship (i.e. shared understanding) between sender and receiver is guaranteed by the content and form of the message, Hall argues that messages are open to a variety of interpretations, or polysemic. Meaning is always to a certain extent fluid because signs used in mass media are simultaneously both connotative and denotative and their meanings are not completely naturalized or consensualized (Hall, 1980, 133). Decoders may take the encoder's intended or preferred meaning (e.g. tobacco sponsorship is harmful), an inverted or oppositional meaning (e.g. tobacco sponsorship is good because the government has abandoned support for cultural events) or a negotiated version that modifies the preferred meaning to a greater or lesser degree (Hall, 1980, 136-138). The variety of interpretations available to audiences

is a result of the existence of a variety of interpretative or discursive formations within a society. As a crude example, an environmentalist may decode a different meaning from an advertisement sponsored by a pulp and paper association than someone whose livelihood, and hence social position, depends on the forest industry. Rather than see the language and other symbolic systems as rigid and static, Hall argues that ways of perceiving, thinking and behaving arise from complex historical and material conditions of social formations which emerge through the “articulation of language on real relations and conditions” and, while over-determined, rest on the lack of economic and social equivalence among individuals and groups (Hall, 1980, 131). Because power (economic and communicative) is not distributed equally among different social formations, negotiated and oppositional readings of messages from encoders occupying privileged positions may tend to arise more frequently among individuals identifying with social formations that contest existing power arrangements.

While Hall’s analysis acknowledges and helps account for various interpretations of communications, it may leave the social marketer in a state of despair: if all messages are polysemic, how can communications be effective? Nevertheless, several practical applications present themselves. Hall’s model of communication correlates readings or interpretations with discursive formations or what he calls clusterings, which are related to positions within the socio-economic order (Hall, 1980, 135). This presents an alternative basis on which to conduct pre-campaign social marketing research. Instead of segmenting audiences into demographic markets, research could be conducted to identify discursive or interpretative communities. This requires more qualitative research which explores how

individuals view the issues that social marketer wants to address on the basis of their experience within different age, class, ethnic and racial social structures (Sinclair, 1987, 39). To a certain extent, social marketers at Health Canada have attempted similar segmentation strategies using the psychographic approaches discussed in Chapter 1. However, rather than using psychographics merely to identify segments that may be more open to its dominant or intended meanings, discursive segmentation could provide more complex insights into how potential communication approaches may be interpreted by other groups. This may help prevent unintended consequences that could detract from a campaign's overall impact.

More importantly, discursive, rather than demographic or psychographic segmentation could help social marketers devise strategies to reach populations that are more apt to produce oppositional or negotiated meanings. Both short and long-term opportunities exist. By understanding discursive practices of various segments, social marketers could more consciously emulate the efforts of commercial advertisers who appropriate or incorporate "actual cultural characteristics into messages so as to invite [members of these groups] to identify with a commercialised image of themselves" (Sinclair, 1987, 38). As Philip Adams observes, "within weeks of the media discovering Women's Lib, Phillip Morris were (sic) singing 'you've come a long way baby' and handing out the Virginia Slims" (quoted in Sinclair, 1987, 40). For anti-smoking campaigns, however, this particular strategy would be difficult to implement as cigarette advertisers have effectively identified smoking with a variety of cultural formations and imbued their product with properties of individualism, masculinity, femininity, rebellion, etc., depending on the particular market

they are addressing. Positioning non-smoking in these terms would require undoing more than 50 years of extensive and expensive efforts. A better approach might be based on an understanding of how cigarettes have been implicated in various discursive formations. Tobacco marketing could be countered by attempts to “denaturalize” these positions by showing members of different discursive segments *how* they have been recuperated by the commercial interests of tobacco manufacturers. Communication strategies based on these approaches would not overtly attempt to paint cigarette manufacturers as evil for selling dangerous products through sponsorship, but instead show how advertising and other communications strategies have been deployed to co-opt different segments. In the longer term, the use of discursive segmentation, by providing insight into how experiences of class, age, race, etc. are imbricated with discursive formations, could provide a basis for addressing structural social factors that contribute to the adoption of behaviour. This implies, however, the development of approaches which are not necessarily communicative in nature, but those which address the experience of power (or lack thereof) within different social groups.

Advertising and cultural meaning

While the sender→message→receiver model of communications relies on a behaviourist mechanism of effects, more recent works that examine advertising from a cultural perspective define effects more broadly as a provider of meaning. Rather than provide consumers with information about products and services in an attempt to influence knowledge attitude and behaviour, these cultural approaches share the view that the

effectivity of advertising lies in its ability to help audiences generate meaning through interactive discursive processes. It is these *processes* that in turn influence opinions and behaviour in their role in identity formation and through ideological effects.

One elaboration developed by Martin Davidson (1992), a former advertising agency employee, argues that “advertising is more than a market strategy” because it involves “the social meaning of objects” (Davidson, 1992, 121). By examining advertising as culture (artefact and process), Davidson elucidates an argument that advertising provides symbols that help structure social relationships and provide consumers with meaning (Davidson, 1992, 123). Understanding how contemporary advertising works, and brand advertising in particular,¹⁹ requires seeing communications as a dynamic process in which the audience actively participates in a process of constructing meaning (Davidson, 1992, 123).

Successful brand advertising does not focus on the qualities of the product being promoted. Instead, brand advertising, using significant symbols from other cultural forms, (significant because audiences interpret them as such) creates and exploits a relationship with audiences (Davidson, 1992, 24, 136). This perspective is advanced by other writers such as Julie Lannon, who argues that advertising “turns products into brands, and shifts the emphasis away from the performance-based properties of what the manufacturer makes to the meanings and values delivered by what the consumer buys” (Lannon, 1985, 527).

¹⁹ The writers in this section almost invariably refer to brand advertising as a basis for their discussion of advertising effects. This does not mean that informational approaches cannot have effects when the audience member or consumer is seeking information related to a decision they have already intended to make, or in situations where behavioural change is perceived as low-cost and the benefits are concrete and immediate (see

In terms of their assumptions about audiences, these approaches differ sharply from the transmission model underwriting social marketing theory. In social marketing approaches, for example, promoting the qualities and benefits of a product assumes that audiences seek information. As Rados bluntly suggests, advertising works by “making information known” (Rados, 1990, 144). Lannon and Davidson, however, assume that what audiences seek is not so much information as meaning. To highlight the distinction, Davidson provides a different perspective on how soap is marketed that strongly resonates with *Social Marketing*’s seminal question “why can’t we sell brotherhood like soap?” (Kotler and Zaltman, 1971, 3). Kotler’s answer would be to research consumers’ washing behaviour and attitudes towards hygiene, develop a product with the shape, colour and scent that reflected the target market’s ablutions and promote these qualities in advertisements. Davidson, however, argues that the reason for the success of British washing powder Persil does not lie in its product attributes, but because it has created a symbolic social relationship with consumers. Persil advertising has created incredible consumer loyalty “by being about people, not powder, about love, not washing” (Davidson, 1992, 24).

Another model of advertising communication that moves beyond the behaviourist assumptions in the transmission model’s stimulus-response theory can be found in Judith Williamson’s (1978) structural and semiological analysis of advertising. Where Hall accounts for the polysemic nature of mediated communications in the existence of different discursive formations, Williamson uses the theories of Lacan, Freud, Althusser, Saussure,

Rangan, 44). However, as both the existence of brand advertising and studies of informational campaigns attest, some consumer behaviour is motivated neither purely or nor primarily by information.

Levi-Strauss and Barthes to examine how decoding occurs in relation to the formal properties of advertising. Briefly, Williamson argues that advertisements have effects on their audiences through a process of meaning-creation. Through their selective arrangement of linguistic and graphic components,²⁰ advertisements attempt to transform the inherent material attributes of products into properties which have cultural meaning to the consumer (Williamson, 1978, 12). Put differently, advertisements translate the use value of a commodity into an exchange value by positioning products as “currency” which can be exchanged for a desired quality, situation or relationship (Williamson, 1978, 38). This occurs by connecting a quality of an unnaturally related object, person, event, mood, etc. (e.g. Catherine Deneuve) with a product (e.g. perfume). This juxtaposition of an image or text with a product facilitates the transfer of meaning from one to the other.

Like Hall, Dervin, Lannon and Davidson, Williamson argues that the process of meaning creation is dependent on the participation of the viewer, who makes the connection between the juxtaposed objects using appropriate cultural knowledge (Williamson, 1978, 42-44). For example, the “meaning” of Catherine Deneuve’s face (glamour, femininity, etc.) could not be transferred to Chanel perfume if viewers did not already associate Deneuve with these qualities. Advertisements play a role in identity formation by creating absences in which the consumer places him or herself and through appellation – offering the viewer a coherent and unified self with which to identify (Williamson, 1978, 50). It is this active process in which meaning is created and through which effects occur:

20 In *Decoding Advertisements*, Williamson limits her analysis to print advertisements and does not include motion or auditory elements of other media.

You are created by the advertisement and become its currency, in the process of using it: you are signified by the very fact that you give it significance... Our creation of meaning in the ad, as active-receivers, and its appellation of us, as subjects, are synonymous and simultaneous” (Williamson, 1978, 55)

While this process is overtly ideological in that it obscures distinctions of production and class by replacing them with distinctions based on consumption, Williamson’s account also provides an alternative model of the effectivity of communications. Unlike the various approaches found in public communications campaigns that focus on the provision of information to overtly rational subjects, Williamson provides an analysis of how audiences interact with the “creative” components of communications.

A somewhat related account is generated by James Hay (1989) who complexifies both Williamson and Hall’s models by suggesting that in decoding messages or texts, audiences bring to bear cultural “literacy” and “competency” that are based both on the lived experience of the individual within a discursive formation, and codes and practices from outside that formation (Hay, 1989, 135). Because an audience member can participate in more than one formation, and have shifting modes of participation (e.g. the rock fans discussed by Grossberg), the signification of texts should also be conceived “intertextually” (Hay, 136). That is, part of the power of a discourse, or text or advertisement arises from its resonance, within a discursive formation, with other texts (Hay, 1989, 136).

Advertisements, Hay claims, often use icons and styles that signify other texts and are presented in such a manner that invite the audience member to “read it as a collage” of these different elements (Hay, 1989, 137). In other words, the audience recombines the different textual elements within his or her particular discursive formation(s) to generate meanings:

“While advertising... may encourage or enable groups... to construct relationships among signs, these signs must first be (are) understood as already processed objects in a popular culture”(Hay, 1989, 141). As an example, Hay cites an advertisement for Frye boots that depicts a collage of images from the 1960s, including an astronaut on the moon, anti-war protesters, the New York Mets and President Kennedy. The accompanying text asks readers: “Where can you find those values that were so important to us all back in the 1960s?” The range of images clearly suggests a multiplicity of readings that vary with different discursive formations (baseball fan or hippie). Other advertisements, Hay argues, use styles rather than content to create intertextual resonance. As an example, Hay shows an advertisement for an Atari home computer which, through its composition and colour schemes, is clearly “a photographic reworking of Norman Rockwell’s *pictorial* style” (Hay, 1989, 147).

Hay also argues that advertisements need to be seen within their immediate contexts, and not as isolated phenomena, as these contexts are themselves fields of signification that factor into the creation of meaning: “Ads intervene in or insinuate signs into a field of signification, that is, the magazine as montage, television’s flow qualities, the billboard or urban street poster in Europe, or the decorated freight trucks along American streets and highways” (Hay, 1989, 140).

These approaches to communication have implications that are perhaps more immediately pertinent to the analysis of messages, rather than to their creation. From a social marketing perspective, however, they offer more than a competing model of the communications

process. They also provide insight into creative elements of communication that are sometimes downplayed in the sender → message → receiver model. Perhaps most importantly they suggest the need for complex approaches that attempt to brand social products within cultural contexts by associating them with qualities that appeal to audience members' needs for self-identification. Rather than focus on simple, clear and straightforward messages, an approach based on Hay's analysis might deliberately create advertisements and other communications that may appeal to several discursive segments. These communications could also deliberately resonate with other texts and styles that have cultural and social significance. As an example, social marketers need look no further than recent television advertisements for Black Label beer which incorporated visual styles from the 1950s and 60s (with a deliberate "retro" appeal of clothing and furniture, as well as segments from original 1950s Black Label television ads) into contemporary night-club surroundings. Social marketers seeking to benefit from these models might also pay attention to media buying not just from the perspective of reaching demographic segments, but how the venues of communication, in terms of content and style, might interact with social marketer's advertisements to provide material for signifying practices of audiences.

Consumer behaviour as symbolic action

If commercial communications work by and through their ability to satisfy audiences' needs for meaning by providing sites through which objects acquire cultural significance, the adoption of advertised products is also relevant to the re-articulation of a communications

theory for social marketing. Put differently, consumption practices as well as interpretative practices should be included in an understanding of how communications work.

As the social and communicative roles of consumer products were discussed in some detail in the previous chapter, a brief re-iteration will suffice. In that analysis of social products, it was suggested that in both capitalist and non-capitalist societies, products play an important role in the generation and circulation of meaning (McCracken, 1990, 133-134). If, as McCracken argues, the possession and uses of advertised goods provides the consumer with concrete visible signs of social distinctions, the same consumer behaviour can also be seen as markers of discursive formations. While these activities may be seen as a mere re-circulation of the cultural and social meaning transferred to goods through advertising, some goods, through their uses, also provide symbolic content and forms which are incorporated into advertising and other communications.

This is perhaps particularly relevant in the case of cigarette smoking. Klein, for example, suggests that the rituals of smoking are communicative behaviour in their own right, independent of their use in cultural forms such as fiction, movies and advertising. Smoking is not only read as messages by individuals, it is also practised as communication. Klein writes that smoking, in fact, is itself a fully coded rhetorical language:

smoking cigarettes is not only a physical act, but a discursive one - a wordless but eloquent form of expression. It is a fully coded, rhetorically complex, narratively articulated discourse with a vast repertoire of well-understood conventions that are implicated, inter-textually, in the whole literary, philosophical and cultural history of smoking (Klein, 1993, 182).

Rather than depend on cultural forms such as advertising to transfer meaning to the object, Klein suggests that, in the case of cigarettes, the practices of smoking itself – such as offering a cigarette to a stranger, different ways of holding a cigarettes, a man lighting a woman's cigarette, styles of inhaling and exhaling, extinguishing unfinished cigarettes, chain-smoking, etc. – provide codes that are appropriated and re-articulated by other cultural forms. “Smoking cigarettes bodies forth an implicit language of gestures and acts that we have all learned subliminally to translate and that movie directors have used with conscious cunning, with the explicit intention of defining character and advancing plot” (Klein, 1993, 9). To establish the cultural/ communicative power of the cigarette, Klein offers a reading of the film *Casablanca* to show how cigarettes, among other uses, underline poses of aggression, compulsion, and deceit of virtually all the film's characters (Klein, 1993, 174-179). In this model, communicative cultural forms such as advertising, fiction and movies re-articulate meaningful codes, thus providing another layer or mode of what Hay calls resonance. While Klein does not explore the notion of language communities fully, his conception of cigarettes provides another perspective from which to examine smoking as a language. Because smoking is less dependent on advertising than other consumption behaviours for its cultural and social significance, it may require more complex approaches than those traditionally deployed. As Klein's conception of smoking as language raises the possibility of looking at anti-smoking campaigns as a form of censorship, it suggests that social marketers must seek to provide compensating forms of self-expression.

Putting theory into practice

In the introduction to this thesis, I suggested that the theoretical framework of social marketing was lagging behind the practice. In the previous chapter, I showed how social marketers at Health Canada have moved beyond the notion of the social product in their anti-smoking campaigns. A qualitative review of some of the communications practices involved in recent campaigns shows an emerging trend to “break free” of the limits of the transmission or hypodermic model of communications through more sophisticated approaches to branding and attempting to develop and cultivate dialogical channels. Two examples follow.

One recent Health Canada television advertisement shows a young adult male sitting at a bar. While a voice-over lists the chemicals found in cigarette smoke, the frame shows the man squeezing about a dozen cigarettes in his fist. A thick, tar-like substance oozes from the cigarettes and flows down his arm into a glass. The man then drinks the contents, and, as he puts down the glass, he exhales a stream of cigarette smoke. While the voice-over of this approach works on a traditional transmission of information model (by hearing the information, receivers will learn about the harmful chemicals in cigarettes and then change their attitudes and behaviour), the visual and auditory elements work to re-position cigarettes from glamorous to grotesque. It is important to note that the advertisement is not attempting to “brand” the social product of non-smoking, but to address the branding of cigarettes on their own terms. Using Williamson’s interpretative framework, the ad attempts to transfer the repulsive physical properties of the tar “cocktail” to the cigarette by

juxtaposing smoking with the immediately repulsive idea of drinking what appears to be well-used motor oil. The unfolding drama is, on the surface, highly unreal, but this is mitigated by the strong realism of the setting – dark lighting, music, a bartender mixing drinks – which invites the audience accept the situation. The blend of the real and the unreal, Williamson might suggest, allows audiences to work with the ad both consciously and unconsciously.

There is also an interesting visual sub-plot. By setting the ad in a busy bar filled with music, smoking and drinking, the audience is positioned to interpret the familiar aspects of social intercourse associated with smoking/drinking and their portrayal in movies, television and print advertisements. However, while other patrons of the bar are engaged in what appears to be fulfilling social discourse, the ad's main character is isolated, focusing on his chemical "cocktail" even to the point of "ignoring" the attractive woman who appears beside him at the bar. In this sense the advertisement works intertextually, employing the same cultural conventions as those discourses which promote cigarettes, but to a different end.

Another approach that has not yet been extensively adopted by Health Canada but which is cited in departmental literature on social marketing is the creation of more dialogic or conversational communication channels. Eric Young (1992), a private sector social marketing consultant writing in the Department's Health Promotion magazine, stresses the need to develop modes of communication that encourage audience members to speak with each other:

Most social marketing communications have worked along one-way channels; messages have been delivered from a responsible source to an appropriate audience... [I]n light of some the recent developments in communications technology, channels could be opened up to connect people with one another... there are, conceivably, ways to reduce isolation, to create links and to foster a sense of interconnectedness (Young, 1992, 25).

To date, this conversational model has only been attempted to a very limited degree, with the use of 1-800 telephone lines to allow audience members to respond to communications, and through special promotional events where audiences have been invited to create their own anti-smoking communications. The Department has also developed a smoking cessation campaign that urges smokers to engage in their own dialogues with friends and family members about smoking and quitting.

While these approaches offer new opportunities to help achieve social change goals, officials working in social marketing programs do not have a theoretical basis on which to understand them. For example, when asked why she thought the “cocktail” advertisement was successful²¹, a Health Canada marketing official could only suggest that it worked on “a gut level” to turn people off cigarettes (Hazel, August 16, 1996). And while implementing communications processes which do not rely on the one-way transmission model may pose difficulties to a bureaucratically organized institution, not having a theoretical argument on which to make the case for these approaches is certainly an impediment. Formally incorporating some of the theoretical approaches outlined in the previous section into the social marketing discourse may increase odds for success by

²¹ Interestingly, Health Canada officials noted that the advertisement was particularly effective in its traditional measures of recall and intent to modify behaviour (Hazel, August 16, 1996).

providing a basis on which to develop overall strategies and particular tactics that surmount the practical difficulties imposed by social marketing's current theoretical limitations.

While social marketing practice may be constrained by its behaviourist models of motivation and social change, and its simplistic theory of communication effects, it is also both bound and given expression in social change organizations. The next and final chapter of this thesis moves the critique of social marketing beyond its own theories and into its organizational and institutional settings.

Chapter 4 – Institutional Settings

In the first three chapters of this thesis, I examined some of the social change, marketing and communications theories that underwrite social marketing, arguing that they could be understood as factors limiting the success of social change communication efforts using social marketing approaches outlined by Kotler and Roberto and others. In this last chapter, I will briefly examine the practice of social marketing from the perspective of institutional settings to show how these can both account for the adoption of the social marketing approach, and place limits on the development and implementation of social change efforts. The analysis takes as its starting point the writings of Williams (1982), Jackson and Millen (1990), Tuchmann (1978) and others who argue that, to understand cultural artefacts or outputs, one must attend not only to the outputs themselves, but to the practices involved in their production, distribution and reception (Jackson and Millen, 1990, 4). As Ettema and Whitney claim, “the symbols of contemporary culture are more than anything else the products of complex organizations. To understand these symbols, it is necessary to understand among other things the organizations producing them” (Ettema and Whitney, 1982, 7).

Rather than develop a general account of institutional settings and social marketing, I will present the outlines of a case study using Health Canada and its Program Promotions Division as an example. There are two main reasons for the inclusion of this analysis. First, social marketing is chiefly an activity of complex institutions and the individuals working within them. As a result, examining institutional settings is a relevant perspective

from which to address the question of the persistence of the behaviourist theories on which social marketing rests. Second, I wish to counter impressions that may have been created in the preceding discussion, namely, that a theoretical “fix” will be sufficient to remedy practical difficulties encountered by social marketers. While I maintain that a theoretical reformation of social marketing will provide a basis for improving its practice, it is important to recognize that other factors mediate what is and can be done in real situations.

The discussion is intended to be suggestive rather than conclusive – a starting point for additional research and analysis that may propose practical recommendations for dealing with institutional issues. On a theoretical level, the institutional settings of administrative bureaucracies such as Health Canada are itself posited as an explanatory factor for the persistence of behaviourist theories of social change and communication. More practically, the micro and macro-political forces in the federal government bureaucracy are elaborated to show how trends in the production environment both helped establish social marketing as a legitimate approach to health promotion issues, while simultaneously limiting the range of actions available to officials managing the Department’s social marketing campaigns.

Administrative perspectives

A critique of social marketing must eventually ask why behaviourist approaches to social change and communications effects persist in both social marketing literature and practice if

these are both theoretically problematic and empirically questionable. One possible response can be found in the administrative settings of social marketing organizations. The complexity of social marketing compared to more traditional public communications approaches implies the creation of large, complexly structured (i.e. bureaucratic) organizations to manage and administer social change campaigns. Kotler and Roberto clearly recognize this as they devote four chapters of *Social Marketing* to managing social marketing activities, including the bulk of one chapter on how to structure social marketing organizations. These chapters describe approaches to building headquarters and field operations, weigh the merits of a product management versus functional organizational structures, and provide job descriptions for the various types of personnel required (Kotler and Roberto, 1989, 295-313).

In terms of organizational structure and culture, large social marketing enterprises resemble the administrative settings in which behaviourist research emerged. In his review of the “dominant paradigm” of media sociology, Todd Gitlin (1978) suggests that the organizational culture of large bureaucracies itself may have played a role in the development and persistent popularity of behaviourist approaches to media effects. Gitlin argues that the roots of the “paradigm” – the tendency of most media sociology to be concerned with media effects as discrete instances of attitudinal and behavioural change within individuals – can be traced to the behaviourism pervasive in social science in most of the twentieth century. This sponsored a media sociology that sought communication effects in short-term changes to attitude or behaviour (Gitlin, 1978, 211). Gitlin proposes that the ascendancy of this perspective derives in part from its location in administrative settings

(originally, in the bureaucracies of major broadcasters and academic foundations). The predictive theories of audience response which preoccupy media sociology “are necessarily – intentionally or not – consonant with an administrative point of view, with which centrally located administrators who possess adequate information can make decisions that effect their entire domain with a good idea of the consequences of their choices” (Gitlin, 1978, 211).

Kotler’s and Roberto’s claim to provide a methodology that could change social behaviour in predictable ways furnished officials in organizations like Health Canada with a potential course of action consistent with the Department’s mandate of “protecting, maintaining and improving the health of Canadians... by promoting the adoption and maintenance of healthy lifestyles” (Canada, 1993, 1-5). Where more traditional approaches to health promotion focused on disseminating health-related information with little attention paid to the consequences, social marketing offered a methodology that gave administrators the means to measure the impact of their activities.

Gitlin’s critique is also germane to an analysis of public communications campaigns because it provides a basis for establishing the administrative utility of communication theories that view attitudes as “discrete and disconnected units” (Gitlin, 1978, 217). This conception of attitudes and behaviours is institutionally useful in at least two ways. First, it does not require bureaucrats to examine larger social and structural factors lest these be called into question, and with them the institution’s privileged position within the social order. Second, it is conveniently consistent with mandate-driven organizations such as

federal government departments. By reducing attitudes and behaviours to very isolated phenomena, administrators in one department can develop programs to address them without the risk of encroaching on the mandates of other departments. Thus Health Canada officials tend to frame behaviours such as smoking, and drinking and narcotics narrowly as health-related behaviours, and tend not to see how they are dynamically implicated in wider issues of social relations, economic status, race, etc. As Donald Gow puts it: "Each bureaucratic organization looks at the world through its own framework of values... A department cannot see everything... [t]hus, in looking at the world, it takes information of a certain type and disregards everything else (quoted in Mahon, 1977, 173).

Institutional dynamics

To understand how administrative factors shape Health Canada's social marketing campaigns, it is necessary to examine the institutional dynamics both within the department and the federal government as a whole. As a starting point, it is worth outlining some of the principles that have traditionally directed the behaviour of government bureaucracies. First, because government organizations, unlike private corporations, are not profit driven, success of managers is not measured in financial terms, but often by the budgetary and staff resources managers command (Osborne and Gaebler, 1992, 140). Thus a tendency of government managers is to seek to increase the size and prominence of their units within larger bureaucratic structures. Second, in democratic states, government organizations are ultimately accountable to the electorate, who are represented in Canada by cabinet

ministers. This accountability structure applies not only to government policies and programs, but to government communications (Canada, 1988, 6). This implies that the activities of a bureaucracy will to some extent be influenced by the agendas and personalities of the current minister. Third, government bureaucracies tend to be risk-averse. This tendency is related to the second principle: while demonstrable success in achieving a department's mandate is important, it is perhaps not as important as avoiding demonstrable failure, as this can have negative political consequences for the minister who must account for them in the House of Commons to both the Opposition and to the Prime Minister (Osborne and Gaebler, 1992, 21). Fourth, there is an unequal structure of representation within the state bureaucracies; different federal government departments and agencies have unequal influence in larger policy debates (Mahon, 1977, 172). Based on this principle, one would expect that where Health Canada's interests conflicted with those of Departments representing more powerful societal players, that these latter forces would prevail. Each of these principles can be seen at work in Health Canada's social marketing activities between 1987 and 1993.

The fiscal environment

The concrete behavioural impacts promised by social marketing programs had bureaucratic currency with the federal government operating environment of the late 1980s (coincident with Health Canada's adoption of the social marketing framework to health promotion) because they provided administrators with a way of justifying, to more senior government managers and at the political level, the need for larger budgets and staff. This was particularly important when Health Canada's social marketing campaigns were being

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negotiations among the various branches (Ladouceur, August 21, 1996). Thus, the Program Promotion Directorate's requests for increased resources for health promotion activities ultimately came at the expense of other departmental activities. This, in turn, created the need to justify to other actors within the department the distribution of funds away from other activities such as research, health protection, inspections, etc. The behaviourist models of social marketing approaches coupled with the use of quantitative social science methodologies had discursive weight in these negotiations. Because many of the department's research and health protection activities are scientific in nature, the broader departmental culture can be seen as empiricist. By positioning health promotion within a similar framework that alluded to quantifiable results within a model of causation, the activities of the unit were able to achieve more prominence, and respect, within the department as a whole:

In the department, we've gained more profile since adopting social marketing. We were struggling as a unit. We were talking about things that were not known, were feared and misunderstood [by colleagues within the department]. And we were perceived as being very costly. We needed big bucks to do things that [people thought] everyone else could have done anyway... Through the years we have struggled and learned and we have grown... We have positioned ourselves in the department and I think we have done that well. We are recognized as experts... People know we can reach our population, that we can have impact through our methods and our tools (Ladouceur, August 21, 1996).

At the same time other areas of the bureaucracy were being reduced, health promotion and communication activities actually grew from a unit to a full division (the Program Promotion Division). Thus, social marketers' promises of measurable results underscored the fiscal logic behind the increase in health promotion expenditures: investment in disease prevention promised greater returns than expenditures on cures.

Promoting results

One of the main activities used by the Program Promotion Division (PPD) to position itself as credible (and hence worthy of resources) was the implementation of a research program to monitor the effects of the Department's social marketing activities. The program consisted of two types of quantitative research. Post-campaign studies attempted to assess advertising efforts in terms of their immediate impact on health-related attitudes and behaviour. These closely mirrored the hierarchy of media effects proposed by Kotler and Roberto and measured message recall, attitudes, behavioural intentions, behaviour and interpersonal communications (Health Canada, 1991). The second type of research sponsored by PPD consisted of studies on the incidence of the behaviours being addressed by the campaigns – smoking, drinking, and narcotics use. The strategy of PPD management was to link the results of campaign-specific research to larger social trends in health-risk behaviour.

That the demonstration of tangible effects was, in the administrative setting, as or nearly as important as actually achieving them is manifested in PPD's efforts to promote the results of their research studies. While PPD could have circulated the reports produced by its consultants between 1991 and 1993, management decided instead to author three reports on campaign "impacts" called *Making a Difference* (1991), *Making and Difference II* (1992) and *Still Making a Difference* (1993). Despite acknowledgements that other influences likely had an impact on the attitudes and behaviour of target groups, each of the reports concludes that the division's social marketing activities were having a "positive influence on the awareness, attitudes and behaviours of their target groups" and highlighted statistics

that seemed to support this statement (Health Canada, 1991, 7). These reports were published under full-colour covers that featured campaign advertisements and were circulated within the Department. Selected findings, meanwhile, were included in the federal government's departmental Main Estimates in 1991-92 to 1993-94 as part of the "justification of expenditures" for the Health Promotion activity.

Despite claims of success, the reports themselves contain ample evidence to suggest inconsistent and marginal effects on anything other than awareness of campaign activities. For example, the findings on Health Canada's "Really Me" anti-drinking and narcotics campaign link positive attitudes towards alcohol and drugs with campaign exposure. However, they fail to provide an explanation for the fact that research subjects who had been exposed to the "Really Me" campaigns were *less likely* to say they intended to not drink or drink less, and *more likely* to actually drink on a monthly basis and to have tried marijuana than those who had not been exposed to the campaign (Health Canada, 1993, 23). Impacts appeared to be even worse with parents. Those who had seen the "Really Me" ads were more likely to smoke, drink and use non-prescription drugs than those who had not seen the campaign (Health Canada, 1993, 17). In 1993, on page 5 of the evaluation is the claim that a result of the "Break Free" anti-smoking campaign was a decrease of 7,000 in the number of youth between 11 and 17 who smoked daily between the years 1989 and 1993. Readers who continued to page 53 of the same document, however, learn that the 7,000 non-smokers is in fact an "estimate" based on a 1% drop in smoking incidence in surveys whose margin of error was more than plus or minus 2%.

Even more inexplicable is the report's interpretation of longer-term trends that show a decrease in smoking incidence between 1987 and 1990 and an almost exact corresponding increase between 1990 and 1993. In 1987, departmental research showed 20% of francophone youth and 17% of anglophone youth smoked daily. By 1993, 21% of francophone youth were smoking daily as were 16% of anglophones in this group (Health Canada, 1993, 53). PPD claims these numbers show a "slightly downward" trend and argues "that by all the measures available, Health Canada's social marketing campaign against smoking is working" (Health Canada, 1993, 54)²³. So while the research findings make broader claims that PPD's social marketing campaigns were having significant positive impacts, these appeared to be tempered by insignificant results, inconsistencies in longer-term trends and (apparent) significant negative impacts.

In case careful readers questioned the actual attitudinal and behavioural impacts of the social marketing campaigns, PPD also promoted its activities by highlighting the fact that its "health promotion social marketing campaigns are increasingly being used as a foundation for developing and implementing other campaigns and programs" (Health Canada, 1993, 5). This included noting that PPD's social marketing campaigns had won

²³ Furthermore, the publications do not provide complete results from the consultants' research nor do they include copies of the questionnaires, details of the interviewing techniques and sampling strategies used. For example, in the 1991 assessment for the impact on the "Really Me" campaign, only the proportion of respondents who *highly* disagreed with the statement "a party is not a party without drinking" is revealed, not those who may have merely disagreed or, in fact, agreed (14). Given that results included in the reports often fail to indicate statistically significant ("positive") differences in attitudes, intentions and behaviour between respondents who had been exposed to the social marketing campaigns and those who had not, it is reasonable to question the impressions that the missing information would have created. When questioned about the extent to which research findings supported the conclusion that the social marketing campaigns actually had empirically demonstrable impacts on behaviour, PPD's chief research officer questioned the value of this analysis and declined to participate in interviews with the author.

more than 27 awards, had been cited as case studies in marketing textbooks (including Kotler and Roberto's *Social Marketing*) and that departmental officials had been asked to deliver presentations on social marketing "at more than 75 national and international conferences" (Health Canada, 1993, 6).

The reports' recommendations, however, tend to be based on PPD's own interpretations rather than on an unbiased assessment of the facts themselves. The reports argue that long-term commitments to social marketing are essential (Health Canada, 1991, 56; Health Canada, 1993, 62) and that the programs should be expanded to include "other social marketing elements" (Health Canada, 1991, 56) into a "comprehensive health promotion strategy" (Health Canada, 1993, 64). Thus the *idea* of tangible effects (rather than any consistent evidence of their existence), framed within widely accepted social science methodologies for achieving them, was used to support the cause for constructing, maintaining and expanding a bureaucratic unit.

Entrepreneurial government

The ideology of competitiveness which was used to justify reduced program expenditures also informed the development and promotion of new management practices within the federal public service. Government officials, prompted to provide measures of effectiveness (which as I have argued dovetails with social marketing approaches), were also encouraged to adopt management practices from the private sector. Their motivation came from the Progressive Conservative government's devaluing of the public sector through discourse and activities aimed at "getting government out of markets" by reducing

the bureaucracy's regulatory powers, privatizing government operations and making governments "more efficient and less costly" (Department of Finance, 1992, 1-2). One of several texts that encouraged government administrations to become more efficient, enterprising and market-oriented was Osborne and Gaebler's *Reinventing Government* (1992). This widely read book (four printings in its first four months) suggested that government bureaucracy could become more relevant if it adopted the customer-driven, results-oriented and entrepreneurial techniques of the private sector, modified them and applied them to the public sector, where applicable.

Once again, the administrative environment corresponded well to the discourse and practice of social marketing. Social marketing's name associated it immediately with the **market-**orientation and activities of private sector enterprises, which were being held out as role models for federal government managers and administrators. Through publications, conferences and university courses, social marketing was widely promoted by Health Canada managers as a practical application by government of what was initially a private sector discipline. These activities helped create the impression within Health Canada that "social marketing was a really sexy thing" (Ladouceur, August 21, 1996). Public officials speaking and writing about "client research," responding to "customer needs" and practicing "audience segmentation" should not be dismissed as factors that contributed to the entrenchment of social marketing approaches to health promotion.

Health Canada's social marketing managers were also extremely adept at being entrepreneurial by attracting outside resources to supplement those provided by the Department. In its 1993 evaluation report, PPD lists nearly 75 private sector partners who

provided time, work, funding, material and expertise that it claims was worth more than \$50 million between 1987 and 1993 (Health Canada, 1991, 79). Based on PPD's calculations, this actually exceeds the approximately \$37 million the federal government spent on these programs (Health Canada, 1993, 79). This clearly coincided with management techniques endorsed by writers such as Osborne and Gaebler, who proposed that governments "think like investors" to earn returns (Osborne and Gaebler, 1992, 206). PPD's report even adopts the language of private enterprise, calculating the "return on investment" of its efforts to attract sponsors and the amount of "leverage" it was able to obtain (Health Canada, 1993, 79). Corporate sponsorship provided more than resources, however. In an environment praising private sector management, it also gave added legitimacy to social marketing approaches to health promotion.

However, at Health Canada, the development of partnerships also inevitably imposed some constraints. As PPD officers recognized, forming partnerships with provincial and territorial governments, non-government organizations (NGOs) and private enterprises involved a "shared authority and responsibility for delivering programs and services" (Health Canada, 1993, 76). It is not unreasonable to assume that corporate sponsors in particular would expect to receive some benefit from their association with Health Canada.²⁴ What Health Canada brought to the table was its unbiased and "excellent reputation... for caring about the health of Canadians. Because we are seen as leaders with expertise, the association is a good one [for corporate sponsors]" (Ladouceur, August 21,

1996). These partners, however, sometimes wished to have an influence on the content and style of social marketing communications (Ladouceur, August 21, 1996). To maintain creative “control and integrity” of a campaign, PPD adopted a policy of limiting corporate sponsorship to individual projects, rather than entire campaigns. However, sponsors often had input in initial strategy and creative sessions: “What you do is you talk with all your partners and you come to a consensus and you get some broad lines. From that it is our job, with the agency, to come up with the creative... The agency gets direction from us” (Ladouceur, August 21, 1996). During interviews, PPD officials also hinted that NGOs such as Physicians for a Smoke-Free Canada and the Canadian Cancer Society can exert creative and strategic influence through their access to the minister. When asked whether these bodies had influence over campaigns, a PPD official responded:

I don't know if I can comment on that. We're not that close to that file to say whether they have any influence or not. That's the official answer. However, they do meet with the minister. I think that anyone can meet with the minister and I think that if they have an issue they feel is important, that fits in with our strategic direction, that can be accommodated (Ladouceur, August 21, 1996).

Avoiding risk

While the adoption of private business practices and discourse can be seen as an element of the administrative setting that enabled social marketing approaches to become entrenched at Health Canada, the same administrative setting also set limits on what could be accomplished. In Health Canada's case, PPD's location within a government department placed it within a corporate culture that had little tolerance for risk or support for creative innovation. As suggested earlier, the hierarchical structures that end (or begin) with the

²⁴ PPD staff did not calculate the value of partnerships to its corporate sponsors. Given that in some cases,

departmental minister create direct links between bureaucrats responsible for the development of highly visible communications activities and the person who is ultimately responsible for them. While similar reporting structures exist in large private sector corporations, the ultimate responsibility here is to its majority owners, who are typically few in number and primarily interested in profit. Governments, who spend taxpayers' money, must accommodate and mediate a wider range of interests (Osborne and Gaebler, 1992, 20). This incubates an environment in which government administrators tend to avoid controversy: "In government all of the incentive is in the direction of not making mistakes. You can have 99 successes and nobody notices, and one mistake and you're dead" (Winnick, quoted in Osborne and Gaebler, 1992, 21).

Risk avoidance in Canadian government communications is also ensured through codified policies and the structures that oversee government-sponsored advertising. Developed in 1988, the *Treasury Board Manual on Government Communications* outlines the broad goals, roles and responsibilities for the management of federal government communications. While the policy makes each institution accountable for the content and style of its communications, it advises officials that messages should "use plain language and be expressed in a clear and consistent style" (Canada, 1988, i,12). The policy also places limitations on how people are portrayed in advertisements to ensure that government communications avoid sexual stereotyping ("the use of words actions and graphic material that assigns roles or characteristics to people solely on the basis of sex") and are inclusive in

corporations such as Kellogg's and Maple Leaf Meats were able to display the Health Canada and federal government logos in materials advertising their products, this value is not inconsiderable.

nature ("all individuals irrespective of ancestry, ethnic origin, or disability... must be portrayed as equally productive and contributing members of Canadian society," (Canada, 1988, i,13). While these directives are worthy and consistent with a multicultural democracy, they certainly do not apply to the creative communications of commercial marketers who have routinely exploited sexual stereotyping in efforts to brand products such as beer, liquor and cigarettes.

Perhaps more significantly, however, the policy delineates clear roles and lines of authority in the practice of government communications which serve as checks and balances on the creative impulses of any particular group of officials and their advertising agencies. The policy accomplishes this by making communications a shared responsibility among individuals and organizations both internal and external to any given department or agency. For example, not only does the policy ensure that departmental communications are subject to the influence of the Minister and his or her political staff, it assigns degrees of accountability and responsibility to Deputy Ministers, departmental Heads of Communication, communications staff and policy advisors and program managers (Canada, 1988, i, 7-8). Outside the Department, all communications and advertising campaigns are subject to the scrutiny of Treasury Board, a Cabinet Committee on Communications, and the Advertising Management Group, which is resident in the Department of Public Works and Government Services (Canada, 1988, i, 8-10). This last group consists of contracted "experts" who are tasked with ensuring that regional interests are represented. Any advertising campaign must be approved by the Advertising Management Group (AMG) who reviews not only expenditures, but "the soundness of the creative approach, media

plan, etc. of the intended advertising” (Canada, 1988, i 10). The role of the AMG amounts to far more than rubber-stamping whatever approach a department proposes. According to a former AMG staff member, the group exercises creative influence on government advertising through its direct role in selecting which advertising agencies will be used in any particular government campaign:

The AMG staff who sit on committees have far more experience in advertising than most departmental bureaucrats. They often come from the industry and sit on [agency] selection committees every week. This allows them to be very persuasive... They can also play a direct role in the creative aspect of a campaign. I’ve sat on committees where the AMG representatives have come right out and told an agency what they would be expected to produce if they were to be awarded the contract (Gosselin, April 19, 1993).

This complex of influences on government advertising and communications can re-enforce the risk aversion that Osborne and Gaebler suggest is inherent to most government bureaucracies (Osborne and Gaebler, 1992, 21). This in turn, may re-enforce the production of media messages that are straightforward and linear and do not attend to the creative elements of branding as closely as marketing campaigns sponsored by private corporations. Health Canada officials alluded to this when discussing an anti-smoking television advertisement that aired in 1993. The advertisement showed a teenage girl playing with her friends. The idea of her taking up smoking is alluded to by her physical transformation (accomplished through computer animation) into a cigarette. This “morphing,” according to Health Canada officials, was “supposed to reflect the transition period of adolescence” (Hazel, August 16, 1996). The unusualness of this advertisement, however, generated criticisms that reached senior levels of the bureaucracy and led to an “unfortunate controversy” (Hazel, August 16, 1996). Ultimately, the ads were pulled.

The Minister as CEO

As suggested earlier, the principle of ministerial accountability, by creating shared responsibilities and dampening the willingness to take creative risks, helps structure the institutional settings in which Health Canada's social marketing campaigns are created and implemented.²⁵ The minister responsible for Health Canada also shapes campaigns through his or her personal and political priorities. In a large department such as Health Canada, several activities compete for priority, subject to both internal and external agendas. For example, the recent inquiry into the safety of Canada's blood supply consumed much of the department's energies and efforts (Hazel, August, 16, 1996). Furthermore, when the department's social marketing campaigns began in the late 1980s, until 1993, the minister for health was also responsible for the social welfare portfolio that administered the expensive and highly visible federal income supplement, welfare and pension programs (Canada Communication Group, 1993, 7). When a particular minister has personal or political interests in the issues being addressed by social marketing campaigns, these may receive greater political attention. As a PPD manager explained: "We also have a rotation of the CEO – the Minister... and some of them tend to take on the cause with greater enthusiasm and some of them have other interests. Some of them decide that perhaps it's not the right time to do certain things" (Ladouceur, August 21, 1997).

²⁵ As an example of direct day-to-day impacts on staff activity, several scheduled interviews with Health Canada officials had to be postponed because PPD staff were suddenly tasked with preparing briefing notes for the Minister and her staff. One interview was inadvertently interrupted on three occasions as a PPD staff member was involved in urgent preparations of documents for Question Period.

Interdepartmental hierarchy

While a departmental minister can exert influence on campaigns, this chief executive officer ultimately answers to a board of directors. In Health Canada's case, other Cabinet Ministers and the departments they represent serve as that board which in turn circumscribes the Minister's possibilities for action. The interests that these ministers mediate can engender policy implications of direct consequence to the activities of other departments, including Health Canada. As Rianne Mahon argues in her structural analysis of Canadian public policy, the state bureaucracy, in addition to advancing the concept of the "national interest," represents interests of various competing social formations (Mahon, 1977, 172). For example, Industry Canada tends to represent small- and medium-sized businesses in bureaucratic policy negotiations, while those of First Nations or aboriginal peoples would be represented by the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. In Mahon's Marxist framework, the principal role of the state is to "organize hegemony" in such a manner that the interests of society's dominant economic classes tend to prevail (Mahon, 1977, 68, 172). In part, this is accomplished through what Mahon calls an "unequal structure of representation" in which the hierarchy of the public service reflects the broader social and economic hierarchy within society (Mahon, 1977, 172).

Mahon's theory is useful because it offers a way to analyze the influence of interdepartmental relations on Health Canada's social marketing practices that is both predictive and explanatory. Using her approach, one could predict that where Health Canada's agenda competed with those of more powerful administrative branches of the government – such as the Department of Finance and the Department of Revenue, Health

Canada's interests would ultimately be subordinated. An example of unequal structures of representation can be seen in 1994, when the economic interests of tobacco manufacturers and the federal government's general interest in maintaining predictable tax revenues clashed with Health Canada's National Tobacco Demand Reduction Strategy. From the late 1980s through the early 1990s, Health Canada officials were successful in persuading Cabinet as a whole and the departments of Finance and Revenue in particular, that raising cigarette prices through tobacco taxes would have a significant impact on consumption and the incidence of smoking. In social marketing terms, this amounted to pricing strategy to "de-market" a competing social product (Kotler and Roberto, 1989, 132). Taxes were increased, and as a result, retail cigarette prices doubled in some parts of the country to \$7 per pack in 1993 from \$3-\$3.50 in 1988. While this coincided with a decrease in smoking, it also spawned a black market in cigarettes smuggled from the United States. Canadian manufacturers were allowed to export cigarettes to the U.S. without incurring excise tax. Sensing under-fulfilled demand among smokers and potential smokers, smugglers purchased comparatively cheap cigarettes in the U.S. (both Canadian and U.S. brands), and resold them in Canada. The prevalence of smuggling both undermined the Department of Finance's desire for politically expedient ways of increasing revenues and provided tobacco companies with a tenable law-and-order position on which to lobby the government to reduce taxes. Despite strong protests from Health Canada, the Department of Finance, Revenue Canada's and tobacco manufacturers prevailed when the government sharply reduced tobacco taxes in the 1994 budget (Hazel, August 21, 1996).

Ultimately, Health Canada's subordinate position to the Department of Finance and other institutions had devastating effects on PPD's anti-smoking efforts:

Price is a big factor [in anti-tobacco campaigns]... The reduction of taxes had a big impact. We felt that all of the energy we'd put in for years as marketers was wasted. We have marketing visions – that's how we see the world. But there are political concerns and elections and different populations that all play a role in the things that are happening at the departmental level. So we may feel, from a marketing perspective, that a certain course of action should happen. But other people, wearing other hats may decide differently for other reasons... political reasons or other reasons (Ladouceur, August 21, 1996).

Not only were Health Canada's attempts to control cigarette prices undermined, the reduction in taxes had discernible effects on creative approaches. As part of its new strategy to demonize the tobacco industry for selling products that kill consumers, Health Canada was considering a series of advertisements that portrayed the industry as callous and irresponsible in its attitudes towards health (Hazel, August 16, 1996; McKim, 1994,16). However, as discussed in the previous chapter, these advertisements did not generate the intended interpretation from target audiences. According to PPD officials, this was partially the result of the government's decision to lower taxes: consumers thought the government was hypocritical for attacking the industry in the advertisements while lowering the tax on cigarettes (Hazel, August 16, 1996).

This brief and partial analysis shows that a dynamic complex of political, economic, organizational and ideological factors structure the administrative setting in which Health Canada's social marketing campaigns are conceived and implemented. Within this setting, social marketing can be seen as a legitimizing discourse for the adoption of certain health promotion approaches and the concomitant expansion of the Programs Promotion Division

within the Departmental bureaucracy. At the same time, however, this complex of influences places clear limits on the activities of social marketers working within the setting.

Conclusion

This thesis has attempted to show how social marketing approaches to social change are constrained by both theoretical limitations and the material circumstances of production. The objective was to lay the foundations for a critique of social marketing theory and practice that helped identify and explain issues and shortcomings while offering alternative approaches that could be used in a theoretical re-formulation of social change communications. Because social change campaigns are about practice, I have also suggested how my proposed theoretical remedies also have practical applications. To conclude, I will summarize the main elements of the preceding arguments and suggest how additional research and analysis could build upon the critique of social marketing developed here.

In Chapter 1, we saw that at their core, social marketing approaches are based on an understanding of social change as positivistic, teleological progress. Within this view, social marketing theorists, exemplified by Kotler and Roberto, conceive of campaign subjects as individuals who are, or should be, fundamentally motivated by reason¹. In social marketing approaches, social problems become re-articulated at the level of the individual – social change becomes merely the aggregate of many individual changes. Approaches to social marketing research and campaign design, meanwhile, tend to further abstract the individual from his or her social context in attempts to understand target groups as compilations of static individuals who possess a variety of demographic or attitudinal characteristics. Using this research, social marketing strategies consist of attempts to

develop a rational coherence between beliefs, attitudes and behaviour. Briefly, we saw that these approaches are problematic because, in framing problems at the level of the individual, social marketing theory suffers from a lack of consideration of dynamic social settings and interactions. Further, Kotler and Roberto, and others' insistence on the rationality of subjects means that communications campaigns based on social marketing theory are completely unequipped to deal with the possibility that individuals are not motivated by an inextricable need to hold opinions and behave in concordance with what they believe to be true.

Towards the end of the chapter, I suggested that a range of alternative approaches to motivation and behaviour exist which do not rely on the notion of fixed and stable identity or the need to minimize what Kotler and Roberto call cognitive dissonance between belief, affect and action. These approaches allow for "irrational" motivation because they situate behaviour within complex social environments which place shifting demands on individuals and offer them a changing array of opportunities to address what Fiske calls the "constitution of individuality" in tension with social forces that seek to individuate them within an ideological framework. These alternative approaches, I argued, can be applied to how social marketers frame the problems they address and how they conduct formative campaign research. It also suggests a need for campaign managers to be self-reflexive and to understand their efforts as an application of social power that can have strategic and tactical consequences for the social change objectives they pursue.

Chapter 2 examined one of the key marketing principles that social marketing approaches borrow from commercial marketing: the social product. The social product is important to social marketing theories because these latter rest on the idea of an exchange – without a product or service on offer, exchange cannot occur. I suggested that there were several theoretical shortcomings with the concept of a social product: that the social product is based on an under-developed and confused analysis of needs and wants; that in turn, social products are developed to be providers of utility; and that social products are too often negative (in that they defined as absences of attitudes or behaviour) or conceptual. These theoretical shortcomings, I argued, give rise to important difficulties in developing and conducting marketing activities such as pricing, distribution, branding and promoting. The analysis suggested that these problems contributed to a shift in strategy in Health Canada's anti-smoking campaigns from attempts to promote non-smoking behaviours as such, to fostering public support for regulatory controls on smoking. Despite the difficulties with the idea of social products developed in social marketing theories, the product metaphor can be a useful analytical tool for social marketers attempting to understand behaviours, such as smoking and drinking, which are product-based. By expanding the conception of products from mere providers of economic utility to sites for the creation and perpetuation of social and cultural meaning, social marketers can better understand the behaviours they seek to alter or displace. The view of products advanced in this chapter stressed the need to see products in conjunction with consumption behaviours and to thus recognize that often, products do more than satisfy material needs – they also provide the elements to live a social life, as Michael Schudson has argued. I also described how this view of products was important to another important marketing principle – branding – and suggested, based on

the writings of Grant McCracken and Mary Douglas, that brands serve identity needs and provide cultural reference points for consumers through a series of consumption rituals.

Expanding the idea of the product to include its social, cultural and symbolic values provides a more complex and realistic basis for assessing product-based behaviours such as smoking and drinking. Smoking and cigarettes offer more than a stimulation of the nervous system, taste, aroma and something to do with your hands. Throughout their history, cigarettes in general and different brands in particular, have served to mark important social distinctions by substantiating cultural categories such as men and women, blue-collar and white collar, city and country. In the face of persistent anti-smoking campaigns, cigarettes now serve to mark distinctions between smokers and non-smokers, which suggests another level of self-reflection for social marketers engaged in efforts to reduce the incidence of smoking. Finally, by using Baudrillard's analysis of needs and products as inextricably linked to a system of production, I argued that a critique of social marketing must also address the political and ideological elements that tie it to other structural forces.

In the Chapter 3, we learned that social marketing approaches to communications, like those found in most of the public communication campaign discourse, are derived from a transmission model of communications which see effects as discrete changes in the attitudes and behaviour of individual. Social marketing approaches like those advanced by Kotler and Roberto are distinguishable from other public communications approaches primarily on the basis that the former serve to promote social products. Most models found in the literature, including social marketing, rely to greater or lesser degrees on the inoculation of

predictable attitudinal and behavioural effects. The variety of models of communications approaches are the result of social scientists elaborating successive sophistications of the sender→ message→ receiver model, rather than a thoughtful analysis of that model's assumptions. We also learned that approaches based on the hypodermic transmission model continue to persist despite scant empirical evidence that they help engender the social change intended by practitioners who mount campaigns based on these models. I reviewed six key features of the model: that effects are theorized almost exclusively at the level of the knowledge, behaviour and attitudes of individuals; that audiences are abstracted from their social environments; that information is conceived as a "magic bullet" that directly creates predictable cognitive, attitudinal and behavioural effects; that audiences are passive recipients of meaning; that communication is unidirectional; and that power and agency tend to be excluded as operative in the articulation of effects. In assessing these features, I suggested that the assumptions underlying the transmission model of effects were related to Kotler's and Roberto's assumptions about social change. I also attempted to show how theoretical shortcomings in the transmission model could lead to practical difficulties for social marketing practice.

In Chapter 3 we also saw that there are a variety of theoretical approaches to communications which address the problematic assumptions of the behaviourist transmission approach. These models tend to see the operation of effects as the result of what audiences do with communications. Writers such as Brenda Dervin suggest that audiences use communications to assist themselves in disjunctures and that the uses and

gratifications they derive from mediated communications are directly related to their personal situations. Stuart Hall's model of communications as a socially-embedded process of encoding and decoding provides a theoretical basis for comprehending the "misreadings" encountered by social marketers. I also briefly outlined work by other writers such as Sinclair and Hay who see the creation of meaning related to social and cultural formations. These approaches, I argued, provided more complex ways of seeing the operation of effects, on both behaviourist and ideological planes. They also suggest different directions in the conceptions and execution of social change communication campaigns. Among those that were raised in the chapter were: the cultivation of dialogical communication channels; the use of discursive segmentation as a way to conceptualize different audience groups; the use of creative strategies that provide audiences with the sensory material and culturally resonant symbols to help brand social products; and the de-branding of products such as cigarettes and alcohol using approaches that make it clear how commercial interests have appropriated various discursive formations.

In Chapter 4, I sketched a brief account of the institutional settings of social marketing activities at Health Canada. We saw how the administrative environment itself could be posited as an explanatory factor for the perpetuation of social marketing approaches because similar settings were central to the development and promotion of media effects theories that conceptualized effects as discrete, predictable changes in the attitudes and behaviour of individuals. I also argued that social marketing could be seen as a legitimizing discourse for the bureaucratic advance of the Program Promotion Division (PPD) and its staff and management. Social marketing's promises of concrete, discrete and measurable results

provided a rationale for a series of activities in an environment of fiscal restraint in which public sector management was being asked to adopt models and practices from the private sector. Accordingly, PPD staff took substantial efforts to promote the attitudinal and behavioural impacts of their social marketing campaigns, despite often inclusive or contradictory empirical evidence. However, while factors related to the administrative setting of production facilitated the development of social marketing, other factors place important limitations on what PPD staff could accomplish. Government-wide communications management policies and practices dissuaded creative risk-taking by decentralizing communications functions among several internal and external organizations and officials; sponsorship by private sector organizations wrested some creative autonomy from PPD campaigns; political priorities of various Ministers of Health resulted in fluctuating levels of priority for social marketing campaigns; and Health Canada's subordinate position in the entire federal bureaucracy allowed the Department of Finance to lower taxes on cigarettes and undermine efforts of PPD's anti-smoking campaigns.

Because social marketing is often constrained both theoretically and institutionally, it can be deceptive. On the one hand, social marketers claim to be providing people 'products and services' that they need. However, social marketers may nonetheless advance their vision of social change when these needs are not readily apparent to those who are supposed to have them. While practitioners may believe they are meeting real needs, there is often not enough reflection about whether they are merely manipulating people into "sharing" their particular view of society. This is exacerbated at the theoretical level because social marketing writers almost adamantly refuse to confront issues of power and agency. From

an institutional perspective, social marketers may also be deceived that their project is democratic because it involves “consultation” with constituencies in the form of marketing research. As I have shown, however, this research occurs on a subject-object level where individuals are atomized and constructed as market segments rather than as citizens. Truly democratic approaches would involve more subject-subject research where constituencies are able to express needs, wants and concerns in their own terms and in their own environments.

While I may have serious concerns with the causes taken up by social marketers, and the effectiveness and appropriateness social marketing as a strategy for social change, it is unlikely that communication-based approaches to social change will disappear. Because social marketing, as an approach to social change, has become so embedded in institutional structures, it is my belief that it is better to try to reform it than to advocate its abolition. This thesis lays the groundwork for a critique of social marketing and suggests approaches to theoretical re-formation that can help guide practice. Additional research and analysis, however, could further this work. In particular, research strategies that describe the social foundations for the behaviours that social marketers seek to address need to be more fully developed. And if social marketing theory is going to be in a position to lead practice, additional analysis is required on its central metaphor of exchange. While this thesis suggested that the concept of the product found in social marketing theories is flawed, further work could help develop matrices to determine in which situations the concept of exchange is an appropriate model for social change communications, and which types of situations may require other approaches. Rangan, Sohel and Sandberg have provided one

framework, suggesting that social change situations which have low adoption costs and immediate or short-term benefits to target adopters are best suited to the basic marketing strategies proposed by writers such as Kotler and Roberto (Rangan, Sohel and Sandberg, 1996, 46). Further work could use the arguments advanced in this essay to complexify Rangan, Sohel and Sandberg's matrix by including social and cultural values within the cost-benefit analyses they propose.

In terms of social marketing communications, more work is required to develop concrete practical strategies based on communications models that do not rely on simplified behaviourist theories of effects. The Internet offers one avenue for exploration. This medium's multi-channel structure provides audiences with easier opportunities to express themselves in ways that are commensurate with the institutions who have traditionally sponsored mass-media campaigns. On-line communities-of-interest are another area that could yield fruitful results for social change communications. Additional work is also required to refine the concept of discursive formations and suggest how these can help develop communications strategies that focus on the creation and circulation of social and cultural meaning that, at the same time, advance the causes of social marketing communicators. Some of these efforts would entail empirical work to test the ability to identify useful discursive segments. Finally, this thesis provided only a brief examination of the institutional settings in which social marketing campaigns are conceived and executed. More work is required in this production context. Additional research on the training and professional routines of social marketers, as well as a more detailed analysis of

the broader government policy and legislative environment could help complete an assessment of social marketing's administrative settings.

Endnotes

i Although other types of campaigns are discussed, the focus of this thesis is on social marketing approaches to cigarette smoking. Cigarettes smoking is likely the most preventable health hazard in Canada, and anti-smoking public communications campaigns have been some of the longest-lived, most visible and most politicized in the country. For these reasons, this thesis builds its critique using examples from anti-smoking campaigns. However, in the text of this thesis, no distinctions are made between social marketing campaigns that address behaviours which are considered addictive in a physiological sense (such as smoking and drinking), and that are not addictive (such as seatbelt wearing). The reader may argue that distinguishing between addictive and non-addictive behaviours is essential in any critique of social marketing campaigns. While I do not disagree that social marketing approaches as developed by Kotler and Roberto may tend to be more successful when addressing behaviour that is non-addictive, I would suggest that this distinction is not fundamental to an analysis or a critique of social marketing theories.

Interestingly, Kotler and Roberto, the theoretical “fathers” of social marketing, also omit a discussion of the implications that the differences between addictive and non-addictive behaviour have for social marketing campaigns. While the authors would undoubtedly consider specific behaviour(s) under question when developing a campaign, the lack of theoretical distinctions may, in part, be based on their claim that social marketing provides a “neutral” methodology that is applicable to all types of social change movements (Kotler and Roberto, 1989, 18).

Rangan, Sohel and Sandberg (1996, 45), while they do not discuss addictive and non-addictive behaviours *per se*, classify social marketing objectives in a way that suggests possible distinctions between “voluntary” and “addictive” behaviour. In their analysis of some of the shortcomings of social marketing campaigns in the United States, the authors argue that social change efforts tend to have objectives that fall into one of four categories:

1. Those in which adopting the behaviour is easy or has low costs and whose benefits are immediate (i.e. they accrue to the individual or organization, they are tangible and occur in the near-term);
2. Those in which adopting the behaviour is easy or has low costs but whose benefits are not immediate (i.e. they accrue to society as a whole, they are sometimes intangible and can take longer to occur);
3. Those in which adopting the behaviour is difficult or has high costs and whose benefits are immediate; and

4. Those in which adopting the behaviour is difficult or has high cost but whose benefits are not immediate.

Achieving social change objectives becomes increasingly difficult for each successive category. It is comparatively easy to accomplish an objective that falls in the first category, and comparatively difficult to achieve those objectives if the fourth category (Rangan, Soheli, Sandberg, 1996, 47). Rangan, Soheli and Sandberg cite cigarette smoking-cessation as an example of a fourth category objective where wearing seatbelts would constitute a first-category behaviour. Their matrix for categorizing social change objectives could account for the differences between addictive and non-addictive behaviour, in that ceasing addictive behaviour typically has high costs (e.g. physiological withdraw) whereas refraining from non-addictive behaviours typically has lower costs. Rangan, Soheli and Sandberg further argue that social marketing strategies that fail to consider the distinctions between these different objectives often have poor results. For example, social marketers who are trying to convince people to adopt a behaviour that is easy or has low costs, such as wearing a seatbelt, may succeed purely on the basis of information campaigns that spell out the advantages to wearing seatbelts. Fourth category objectives are much more unlikely to be achieved merely by promotion campaigns – advertisements advising cocaine users to ‘just say no’ are unlikely to have high rates of success (Rangan, Soheli and Sandberg, 1996, 54).

While I do not disagree with the need to use different strategies based on the type of behaviour being addressed, I would suggest that the analysis of social marketing approaches in this thesis provides additional bases for categorization because it asks why some behaviours are difficult to adopt. (In essence, Rangan, Soheli and Sandberg are merely saying that because sometimes it is easy to persuade people to do something and sometimes it is much more difficult, different approaches are called for.)

If smokers continued their habit merely because they were addicted to nicotine, it would presumably be easy to substitute nicotine gum or patches for cigarettes. Also, most anti-smoking campaigns are aimed not at smokers, but at teens and pre-teens who have not yet adopted the habit. For these campaigns, addiction has little relevance, yet there is strong statistical evidence to suggest that these target groups continue to adopt the behaviour. Furthermore, there is little evidence that drugs such as marijuana are highly physiologically addictive, yet their use continues despite social marketing campaigns to the contrary. The critique presented in this thesis argues that smoking has other socially important uses that, aside from its nicotine’s addictive properties, make it a particularly difficult challenge for social marketers. Hence, in my view, the distinction between addictive and non-addictive behaviours, while relevant, is not as important as differences based on the following four factors:

1. The social utility of the behaviour (are there social advantages to continuing the behaviour? is it linked to social agency?);

2. The symbolic resonance of the behaviour (has it been established, through advertising and other media, as a symbolic? can it signify complexly?);
3. The degree to which the behaviour can become associated with a sense of identity (does the behaviour serve to distinguish people from others in complex and identifiable ways?); and
4. The degree to which the behaviour identified as illicit by society's dominant discourse(s) (is it acceptable? tolerated? criminalized?).

ii As the final draft of this thesis was being prepared, the largest U.S. tobacco companies agreed to regulatory controls over the manufacture and marketing of cigarettes, as well as to paying nearly \$400 billion over 25 years to compensate state governments and individuals for smoking related health costs (Schwartz and Torry, 1997, A1). In return, the tobacco industry would not have to pay more than \$5 billion in any one year in legal damages from lawsuits, and would be granted immunity from punitive damages for past acts. The agreement would also bar collective or class-action suits against tobacco manufacturers.

While the deal would have to be ratified by Congress and the White House, many non-smoking groups are applauding it for its restrictions on advertising and promotion. Some analysts have suggested that rising teen smoking rates, caused by effective marketing to children and adolescents, were one of the key reasons behind increasing legal and regulatory pressure that led to the negotiations and the concessions by the industry (Feder, 1997, A1).

The agreement appears to affect three marketing elements. In terms of **product**, cigarettes would be more closely regulated and nicotine could be regulated as a drug by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. It is likely that the agreement will also affect the **price** of cigarettes, as the industry will try to recoup some of the substantial revenues it will lose to damage payments. The agreement will also severely curtail **promotion**, as it places restrictions on the tobacco industry's ability to advertise and to use "characters" such as Joe Camel or the Marlboro Man in advertisements. Product placement advertising in movies and sponsorship of sporting events will also be banned. Some U.S. marketing analysts, however, suggest that advertising restrictions will not mean the end of marketing initiatives. Instead, they predict the use of pure brand advertising, where the product itself is not even represented (Canedy, 1997, D1). In these approaches, the brand and the creative elements would signify the product through its absence. It is even feasible that these approaches could be more successful with children, who may be curious to know what the ads are about. It is also important to note that similar restrictions on advertising are already in place in countries such as France and the U.K., and appear to have had marginal impact on smoking incidence (Canedy, 1997, D1).

From a strategic perspective, the agreement, however, is regulatory and fundamentally coercive – tobacco marketers are being forced to accept regulatory and legal control over their activities. As such, it signals that approaches such as those adopted in Health Canada’s 1994 anti-tobacco demand reduction strategy may become more widespread in Canada. These approaches, as discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis, focus on promoting public acceptance of regulatory and legal restrictions on smoking, rather than attempt individuals or groups to voluntarily change their attitudes or behaviour with respect to smoking.

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Appendix A
Advertising and Marketing Materials

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UMI

Cigarettes: at least they're legal

**Smoking while you're pregnant
is stupid...but I'm not pregnant**

**Smoking or valium...
I've made my choice!**

I tried quitting...I didn't like it.

**Smoking eliminates
male pattern baldness**

It relaxes me...okay?

Smoking isn't my only vice!

Back off, I'm quitting tomorrow