

# TEXTING & DRIVING PSA COMMUNICATION CHECK

## Driver Conversations

Alexandria, VA & Dallas, TX  
May 4-6, 2015



# BACKGROUND

The stats on texting and driving are sobering:

IN 2012

18% 40%

of fatal crashes  
were caused by  
distracted driving

(NHTSA)

of teens feel they've  
been at serious risk  
while riding with  
a driver using  
a cell phone

(Pew Research)

OVER

1 / 3

of teens admit they  
have also texted  
while driving

(Pew Research)

77%

of young adults (18-34)  
don't think texting  
while driving is  
a problem

(Virginia Tech University)

It's not just teens...

50%

of adults admit to  
texting while driving  
and say the frequency  
of doing so is increasing

(USA Today)

Texting and driving is behavior that's becoming more ingrained and seemingly more commonplace. Norms have shifted. The sense that everyone does it makes it feel less risky and less socially taboo at a time when it is increasingly harder to police.

The challenge for The Ad Council and NHTSA: countering texting while driving becoming the new normal. The focus? Turning the trend around among adult who are setting the example and expectations for younger drivers.

# PROJECT OBJECTIVES

On behalf of The Ad Council and NHTSA, Pereira & O'Dell has developed two creative approaches for texting and driving PSAs.

The team wants to gauge consumer reaction, receptivity and potential for behavioral impact prior to deciding which creative approach to move forward. More specifically, the team wants to learn:

What's working now, what could be better, and optimization opportunities for each approach.

Whether the ideas are coming through clearly, in an engaging, relevant and memorable way.

The potential for each approach to impact texting and driving behavioral change.

Jess Moyer, from Good Run Research, moderated all sessions.

# METHODOLOGY

## FORMAT

Three, 75-minute sessions were conducted in each of two markets – Alexandria and Dallas – with one day of fielding per market.

Each session was comprised of 2-3 friendship pairs, for a total of 4-6 consumers per group.

- Friendship pairs keep people honest and add an understanding of social context and dynamic that is particularly relevant for and helpful to the topic of texting and driving.
- Capping session participants at six enables a deep and rich conversation about the creative.

## STIMULI EXPOSURE

For each of the two creative approaches, one rough audio spot and one animatic were shown to represent each territory.

- The order of exposure was varied for both the creative territory and the media format (TV / radio).
- Consumers were directed to write down their impressions and reactions prior to group discussion in order to 'lock in' their opinions and minimize any effects of groupthink or shifts due to a participant with a particularly strong presence or opinion.

## WHO WE SPOKE WITH

Friendship-pair respondents were age-segmented so that in each market there was one group of:

- 18-22 YO drivers
- 23-27 YO drivers
- 28-34 YO drivers

All participants across all sessions:

- Reflected a range of ethnicities and socioeconomic statuses.
- Are licensed drivers who have access to and drive a car at least three days per week.
- Admit to texting and driving at least occasionally, but skew to more frequently.

Parent-status fell out naturally; however, in both markets for the two sessions of non-teen drivers, at least half of respondents are parents.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Texting and driving isn't just becoming more prevalent, it's also becoming more blatant.

The drivers we spoke with had no qualms about admitting that they text and drive on a regular basis. They see themselves as such texting naturals that it isn't really a problem. Most of the time.

All of our drivers reported personal experience with a near miss when texting while driving, yet they continue unabated and unabashed. Near misses are simply accepted as a side effect of texting.

Two creative directions were shown. Neither was exactly right, but both are an unexpected and appreciated departure from established PSA norms. Each direction has elements working in its favor:

- **Special** nailed the insight, but reactions to the song were polarizing. Some appreciated it; others found it cheesy. As the insight itself is powerful, it's worth a strong caution that the song has the potential to detract from the intended message.
- **Idiot** was closer in tonality and the storytelling format worked hard for this execution; however, the insight was off and viewers discounted the message.

In current form, both executions rely upon a conviction of conscience to generate desire to change. Neither offers a clear consequence or a call to curb the behavior. We think there's a way to do that without getting gruesome.

To convict conscience requires social consequence—a resetting of the norm. To change behavior requires corresponding a tangible incentive or disincentive with the social consequence.



# TRUE TALES OF TEXTING & DRIVING

# TEXTS TRIGGER A SENSE OF URGENCY TO RESPOND

Indication of a text received triggers a Pavlovian response to respond. All texts carry at least a moderate level of time sensitivity. Drivers are unable to resist checking an incoming text.

Texts are a form of a conversation. Letting a text go too long a without response feels rude.

There is greater concern with seeming unresponsive by letting a text go temporarily unanswered than with texting while driving. If it seems relatively easy to answer in shorthand or time-sensitive, they'll respond. If it requires a longer response, they may pull over or hold off a bit longer.

Presumably, at least on occasion, some of the other parties to a text must be aware they are texting someone who is driving. Drivers report texting family, friends and co-workers while in motion.

*"Whenever I get a text message, I'll read it and decide if I need to respond right away. If it's time sensitive, I'll respond."*

*"If you're having a conversation with somebody (with texting) and you're not responding, it's like you're offending the person who's texting you."*

*"If I get a text I answer it, no matter what. People in my life expect me to be accessible. I don't want to disappoint them. "*

# COMFORT WITH TEXTING + DRIVING EXPERIENCE = CONFIDENCE IN TEXTING WHILE DRIVING

Young adults have “grown up” texting and consider it second-nature. Some younger drivers may have been texting longer than they’ve been driving.

There’s a sense that until a magical threshold of driving experience is reached, texting while driving should be minimal. With some time and experience behind the wheel, drivers feel they can text and drive with confidence.

There’s a texting double standard--drivers believe there are people who shouldn’t text and drive, but that doesn’t apply to them. They are exceptional texters and driving and texting needn’t be mutually exclusive activities. They believe they know their own limitations and skills well enough to self-police their behavior to manage texting and driving simultaneously.

*“I can do it (text while driving) and do it well.  
It’s kind of second nature.”*

*“I feel like I’ve been texting for so long. I’ve grown up  
texting and I’m also an experienced driver.”*

*“I know you’re not supposed to do it, but I feel like I  
can do it safely. I can text and still pay attention to the  
road. It may not be something everyone should do,  
but it’s not a problem for me.”*

*“Texting and driving is not okay for other people. I  
don’t want to see an old lady doing or pull up beside  
somebody doing it, but I am an experienced texter and  
it’s not a problem for me.”*



# TEXTING WHILE DRIVING IS THE NEW NORMAL

In the spectrum of risky driving behaviors, texting barely registers. There is no stigma to admitting to texting while driving. Nearly all of those we spoke with admitted to texting from behind the wheel often.

Texting while driving doesn't seem much riskier than getting behind the wheel at all. There's nothing remarkable or warranting justification about it. Everyone does it. It's the new normal.

To texters, a near miss isn't nearly enough to permanently curb or cease texting behavior. In fact, a near-miss is almost a badge of honor—it's accepted as part and parcel of being on the road.

A near miss *might* be enough for a driver to put down his or her phone for the rest of that ride. But the texting slate is wiped clean the next time behind the wheel.

*"I texted and drove on the way over here.  
I text and drive a lot."*

*"I pick and choose when I text and drive, but I do it.  
I don't really think it's that big a deal."*

*"I text all the time even with my daughter in the car. I'm on the phone all the time. I have been driving with my daughter in the car, texting and have almost hit someone. I don't know that I'd really stop unless I was seriously hurt or I hurt someone else. If I'm honest, I'd probably take something like that."*

*"I have family who've been in accidents because of texting. I still do it, I guess because it's never happened to me."*

# TEXTER HYPOCRISY IS COMMON PRACTICE

Though they presume “everyone does it,” when drivers spot someone else texting while driving, there is a rush to judgment. It’s fine for them to do it; it’s bad form for others to. Their own driving is mostly unaffected while texting, but some others do “drive weird” and they’re the ones with the problem.

Texters are generally aware that they are likely being judged by other drivers in the same manner.

Dislike of social judgment is a powerful motivator. Social norms and expectations serve as a guidestone for behavior both on and off the road.

Texters are conscious of eyes upon them when they’re texting and look to avoid situations in which they’re obviously caught (or called) out. Other than a traumatic outcome, another situation in which texters may voluntarily change their behavior is through social pressure. If texting were no longer socially acceptable or if there was an actual social consequence for doing it, more texters would think twice.

*“I text, but I still judge other texters. I find them annoying. I’m like seriously, is it that important?”*

*“If I’m at a stoplight and I look over and someone is on their phone, I think ‘Really. You’re driving. Can’t this wait?’ But I know I do it all the time. It’s very contradictory, I know. I know they look at me that way, too.”*

*“I made a New Year’s Resolution to be on my phone less, but now that it’s May it’s fallen off a bit. With my kids in the car, texting isn’t really worth it, but I still do it. I judge other people for doing it though.”*

# CREATIVE REACTIONS



# A TRIO OF CROSS-CREATIVE TRUTHS

Though **Special** was slightly more preferred overall, neither approach is perfect as-is. Before getting into the specifics for each approach, the themes below played out consistently for both creative directions:

Both creative approaches  
are generally appealing and  
relevant to the 18-34 YO target.

The difference was in the degree of appeal for each executional direction:

- Older drivers were more affronted by the word idiot than youngest drivers we spoke with.
- Though all respondents thought the **Special** song was catchy, the youngest drivers were more likely to think it cheesy, while older drivers more often deemed it clever.

The use of humor is refreshing,  
appreciated and runs counter to  
category experience and expectations.

In a category where gruesome visuals, statistics and dire warnings are the norm, the use of clever humor is refreshing, attention-holding and stands out.

Storytelling is powerful—  
people identify with stories  
and relatable situations.

Viewers were drawn to Todd and Matt and wanted to see how their stories would play out.

The texting vignettes and scenarios in special (driving with knee, etc.) were true and identifiable.

Portraying diverse characters with relatable texting scenarios cuts across genders, ages, ethnicities and socioeconomic statuses and enables viewers to insert themselves into the scene.

# END WITH A CONSEQUENCE - NOT A NEAR MISS

Regardless of creative approach, sticking the landing requires ending with some sort of consequence.

Absent of consequence, the use of humor feels like a big wink. It SAYS texting and driving is a problem, but it SHOWS texting and driving happening without repercussion.

Near misses are too pedestrian, but ending with an accident is expected for the category.

Focus on stigmatizing texting behavior rather than scare tactics.

A desire to avoid judgment plays into existing driver behavior—use that to your advantage.

Feature driving-relevant social shaming scenarios:

- Having older kids call out a parent for bad driver judgment from the backseat
- Passengers in the car
- Sitting too long at a green light
- Making a carpooler nervous
- Texting in front of a minivan and realizing you're being watched
- Being caught texting by your mother
- Being that driver who squeals brakes upon realizing that all the cars around are stopped

# WHAT'S WORKING:

## TV Appeal:

5.9 / 10.0\*

(\*Please consider this a directional gauge. This research was qualitative, with conversations with a small number of people in two markets. It isn't projectable, only an indicator.)

## First Impressions:

**Funny, Over-Exaggerated, Parody,  
Harsh, Judgmental, Insulting,  
Alienating, Sarcastic, Honest**



## Radio vs. Television

Liking of the radio spot is only slightly lower than for the corresponding TV execution (5.4/10).

Viewer reactions to the executional format were based on media differences rather than the creative:

- Some viewers prefer the TV because it “shows context and a then what.”
- Others like the radio because “no visuals makes it easier to imagine myself in that setting.”

## What's Working:

The intended message came through clearly.

The story of Matt/Todd holds interest. Viewers want to see where it's leading.

It's a fresh and unexpected approach compared to what viewers expect from the category and feel they've seen before.

The use of sarcasm and humor resonates with and speaks to the 18-34YO age group.

Viewers unaidedly made positive comparisons to similar-feeling campaigns – Dos Equis (Most Interesting Man) and Budweiser (Real Men of Genius). These comparison campaigns are favorites, putting **Idiot** in good company.

The idea has executional legs-- Respondents can envision scenarios with various characters based on the same idea.

The near miss at the end is relatable—“everyone who's texted has been there.”

There was solid playback with respondents able to recall specific executional elements after a single viewing.

**Idiot** accurately reflects how drivers view OTHER people that they see texting while driving

# WHAT'S NOT WORKING:

## The Tone

The over-exaggeration and parody, while liked as a style of humor, did not feel appropriate for the subject matter. To viewers, the jokey tone made it easy to dismiss the message.

## Viewers Don't Buy The Insight:

While they DO see other drivers whose driving is impaired as a resulting of texting as idiots; however, they see themselves as exceptions. They don't see their own texting and driving as a problem to be corrected, don't view their texting as reflecting negatively on their character and don't take kindly to being told otherwise.

## Calling Todd / Matt An Idiot:

Viewers are engaged and beginning to identify with the character, only for the rug to be pulled out from for what seems like one trivial mistake. After being shown multiple illustrations of caring behavior, ascribing a negative character label for one careless behavior is an affront and a turnoff.

## Lack Of Viewer Internalization:

Viewers don't project themselves into this execution. They're watching from a distance and don't like how Todd/Matt is labeled, but don't internalize cause and effect to themselves at all.

## Near Miss Ending Lacks Impact:

While a near-miss is relatable, it's so commonplace that there's nothing to get them to take action. No harm, no foul for the texting while driving makes it seem like no big deal and certainly not worthy of calling someone an idiot.



### In Consumers' Own Words:

*"Just because you make a mistake doesn't make you an idiot. Idiot is an aggressive word and offensive."*

*"Making people feel bad about themselves is not an incentive to make people change."*

*"It wasn't memorable because it wasn't powerful enough. You build up Matt, then make a bold statement with idiot. I want to see what happens and then it's like oh. That happened. Pretty much anyone who's ever texted and driven has a near miss story like that and is still texting and driving."*

*"It was too 'funny' to be taken seriously."*



# OPTIMIZATION OPPORTUNITIES:

Elements to consider switching up to get more mileage out of **Idiot**:

## Illuminate The Incongruence Between Values And Actions

- Texters have a double standard. If they spot a driver who's driving in an impaired way due to texting, they judge them harshly. Not only do they not judge themselves to a similar standard, but they see themselves as an exception to the rule.
- After seeing **Idiot**, some respondents connected that for a person who is so caring in other aspects, texting while driving demonstrates carelessness, even callousness towards others. More importantly, those respondents were able to link that thought to their own behavior.
- Heightening that disconnect and incongruence between their values outside the car and their actions behind the wheel may be more impactful territory to mine.

## Instead Of Building A Pedestal, Reconstruct The Insight

Though there's humor in exaggeration, the construct of **Idiot** focused upon character perfection. What resonates more strongly with respondents is the idea that even the best people can make bad choices. That may be the truth on which to build the spot.

## Pose The Questions And Let The Viewer Answer

The distance between greatest person in the world and idiot is so great that viewers were dismissive and distrustful of it. You lost them. Instead of telling the viewer what to think about the character, why not present the evidence and then ask a question of whether the nicest person in the world would text and drive?

## Diffuse The Language

To some respondents, 'fool' felt more in-line with the perceived minor infraction of texting and driving than idiot. In their view, it conveys the point in a less caustic way.

## Change The Viewpoint

Build the spot from the point-of-view of the pedestrian, passenger or fellow driver to better enable the texter to see and internalize the potential effect of his/her behavior on others. Someone exhibiting kindness sees that impact; texting while driving with only a near-miss allows the driver to think there's no impact. Change that thinking.



In Consumers' Own Words:

*"Everybody's had a near-miss, so it's relatable and can identify with it."*

*"If I was in the car, I'd follow that and not change the channel. It reminds me of the Budweiser Real Men of Genius ads, which were the only ads I've ever wanted to listen to."*

*"I like that it basically says that even the best people can make bad decisions sometimes. I really connect with that."*

*"It talked about how he ran a stop sign and called him an idiot. That's actually what I would think if I saw someone texting and running a stop sign."*



# WHAT'S WORKING:

## TV Appeal:

6.4 / 10.0\*

(\*Please consider this a directional gauge. This research was qualitative, with conversations with a small number of people in two markets. It isn't projectable, only an indicator.)

## Radio vs. Television

The appeal of the radio spot is considerably lower than that of the TV execution (4.8/10).

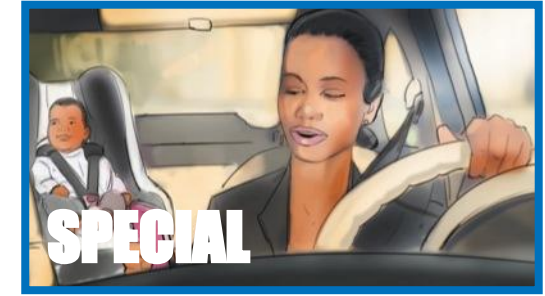
There is polarization between the radio and TV executions based on the music AND lyrics:

- The Wham parody in the radio spot is catchy, but upbeat and whimsical, which seems a mismatch with the lyrics.
- To some respondents, the song's happy and playful tune exacerbates the parody and makes it feel almost patronizing and insulting. To them, it sounded as if you were talking to them as if they were kids or teens.
- The Elton John tune seems a more fitting choice to parody – it's more tonally-balanced for the subject matter and it doesn't feel quite as "kid-like."

To respondents, the radio is harder to listen to than the TV spot, feels more gimmicky and seems to have shorter wearout. Several respondents said they thought it would require several exposures to fully absorb the lyrics, yet told us they wouldn't want to hear it more than once.

## First Impressions:

**Catchy, Comical, Fun, Happy,  
Relatable, Clever, Cheesy, Funny**



## What's Working:

The intended message came through clearly.

The diversity of people shown makes it easier to identify with and place oneself into the situation. It also shows that texting crosses gender, ethnicity, age, and economic status—that gives a sense of the size of the issue and also a sense that no one group of drivers is being singled out. It feels broadly relevant.

The insight is a bullseye. Respondents acknowledge that there is a sense of specialness and exceptionalism behind their texting while driving. Acknowledging this makes them feel embarrassed and guilty and it heightens awareness of the hypocrisy with which they view others who text and drive.

**Special** momentarily takes texters' blinders off and open their eyes to the potential impact of their behavior.

In spite of making texters feel slightly chastened and guilty, the executions aren't insulting or alienating.

The texting scenarios, such as driving with a knee while texting, and holding the phone above the wheel so that the driver remains 'looking through the windshield rather than down,' feel genuine and are highly identifiable.

Humor and parody resonates with and speaks to the 18-34YO age group. It softens the blow of the message and gets the point across without being rude or finger-wagging.

**Special** feels like a huge departure, in a good way, from what's expected for and been done in the category.

In the moment, particularly the radio execution of **Special** has potential to get texters to put their phone down – at least for that trip.

The TV spot is entertaining, catchy and has earworm potential.

# IN CONSUMERS' OWN WORDS

*"This might make me put my phone down. It's embarrassing because it's true. I do think I'm special. That's why I do it."*

*"What this really is telling me is I'm just like everybody else. There's nothing special about my texting and driving abilities."*

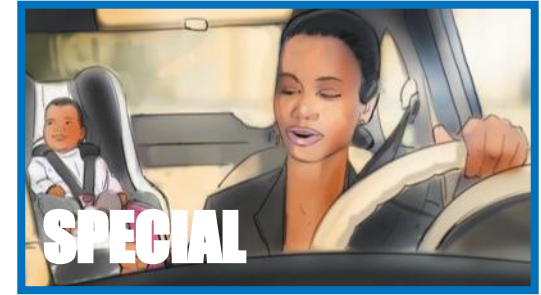
*"I appreciate the brutal honesty or tough love much more than I do a scare tactic."*

*"Makes me feel a little guilty—kind of like I got caught doing something I shouldn't."*

*"It makes me realize that I can connect by disconnecting."*

*"There's something for everyone to relate to with lots of different people and situations represented."*

*"Because it's funny, you can see it over and over again so it has a chance to get in your head."*



# WHAT'S NOT WORKING:

## Executional Shortfalls:

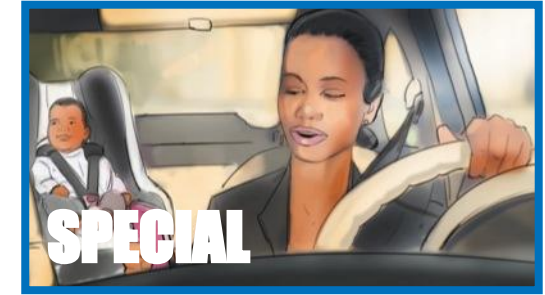
The song, while catchy and clever, is too light and detracts from the underlying message.

**Special** unlocks an emotional response, but fails to seal the deal with a call to action or even a reason to change behavior.

Without any clear consequence to change behavior, there's a sense of "getting away with it."

While the use of parody makes **Special** talkworthy, it feels like a joke is being made of texting while driving.

The song lyrics in combination with the visual of multiple texting characters belie the message—there's a reassurance that 'everyone' texts and drives, which serves as a sense of endorsement for doing it and a sense of validation that the driver is indeed capable of texting and driving without consequence.



## In Consumers' Own Words:

*"Funny – a little too funny.*

*I would talk about that commercial the next day, but it wouldn't make me stop texting and driving."*

*"I kept waiting for a consequence, but it never happened. I'm not stopping my texts and there's no wrecks. We don't have to deal with any fallout. Change is more likely to happen when you have to live with effect you've had on other people's lives."*

*"I know I'm not special, but this isn't really making me feel like I'm not. I'd be less likely to change my behavior after that."*

*"There's no good guy/bad guy in this like there are in smoking commercials. This is almost a reinforcement that we're all in this together. This sort of gives permission. It feels like they got away with it."*

# OPTIMIZATION OPPORTUNITIES:

Considerations for dialing up the power and potential of **Special**:

## Make The Execution As Powerful As The Insight

The song detracts from the message. Consider other executional constructs beyond a jingle to deliver against the insight.

## Use Humor To Reveal Other Incidents Of Hypocrisy

What are other common indicators of 'specialness' that might stoke that same feeling of guilt for being caught in exceptional thinking? Or, what are some other ways besides texting and driving that people unintentionally reveal they think they're special?

## Show The Impact Of Circumventing The Rules

Show or at least imply some sort of consequence so it's impossible to have a "got away with it" takeaway. Catch and embarrass those who think they're too special to follow the same rules as others.

## Demonstrate The Ripple Effects Of Texter Behavior

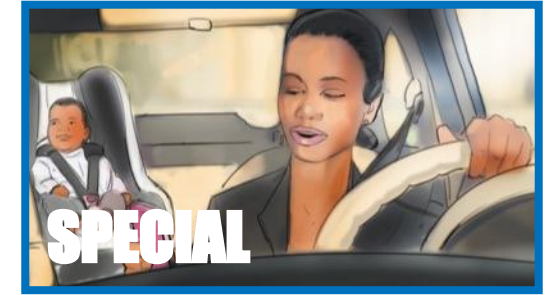
Thread the impact of texting through all the diverse people portrayed.

## Create A Cost For Exceptionalism

Because 'I'm special' is acknowledged truth driving texting behavior, is there a creative path to showing other dangerous or foolish choices made due to magical thinking?

## Build A Special Worldview

This execution has a 'strength in numbers' feel, yet if EVERYONE is special, then no one really can be. What would a world look like if exceptional was the norm and average the exception? What would it look like if everyone bent the rules, just a little bit?



# WHICH DIRECTION HOLDS MORE PROMISE FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT?



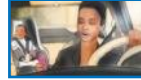
## IDIOT:

This is a case where the execution is over-delivering against a close-but-not-quite-right insight.

Respondents like the guy you're introducing them to and begin to identify with him, so when you call him an idiot, you alienate your audience. Many defend him, saying that one mistake doesn't counter a character of kindness. "Someone can behave idiotically without being an idiot."

They don't, however, project their behavior into the situation. They don't see texting while driving as anything more than a minor infraction and certainly not a hallmark of idiocy. Nor do they take kindly to the label. The over-exaggeration enables them to dismiss the message altogether—you're not talking to them.

There's more resonance in that even the best people can still do dumb things. Focus on stigmatizing the texting rather than the texter and you're much closer to hitting home.



## SPECIAL:

There's something truly resonant and emotionally-charged in the insight. Respondents recognize the truth at the heart of it. It hits them where it hurts and has the potential to spark some real change if it challenges just a little bit more.

The current execution does not align with the power of the insight.

It's funny, catchy and likable, but the song doesn't do the insight justice. It takes the edge off the truth and detracts from the message in a way that lets drivers off the hook.

Viewers do actually begin to internalize the insight as truth and a smidge of guilt for being caught in hypocrisy, but don't feel a need to act on it. Because there's no consequence, they almost feel a sense of validation for their behavior.



**GRRR Says:** Both creative approaches, with some tweaks, have potential. But, if there's a need to concentrate resources behind a single approach, we recommend further development of **Special**.

There's something interesting in the tension of demonstrating caring actions in various ways, then getting into a car and being CARELESS towards others. The drivers we spoke with highly valued being perceived as CARING and acting in congruence with that, and recognized that texting while driving is indicative of CARELESSNESS.

*What if you were able to heighten the disconnect in self-concept between caring in every other way EXCEPT when carelessly texting behind the wheel? What if you are able to get viewers to relate to other times when their actions didn't match their words/values to demonstrate how texting is incongruent with how they otherwise act and the person/mother/son/daughter/friend/coworker they want to be?*

# THANK YOU!



For questions or comments, please contact:

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