

WHOOOPS PROOF BIRTH CONTROL

*Increasing Awareness and Positive Regard for IUDs and the Implant
Through an Advertising Campaign*

INTRODUCTION

The use of highly effective, low-maintenance methods of birth control—IUDs and the Implant—continues to increase in the United States. According to [data](#) from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the use of these methods—sometimes called long-acting reversible contraception or “LARCs”—increased five-fold between 2002 and 2013. Even so, [awareness of these methods](#) is low among those age 18-45—most say they know “[little or nothing](#)” about Implants (77%) and IUDs (68%). Given the relatively low level of awareness, the use of IUDs and the Implant in the United States remains low compared to other methods of contraception. For example, both the [CDC](#) and [Urban Institute](#) cites increasing awareness of IUDs and the implant as key strategy in reducing unplanned pregnancy.

Despite historic declines in teen pregnancy and promising declines in unintended pregnancy more generally, many women are still challenged with the timing and spacing of pregnancy. Given their effectiveness and ease of use, IUDs and the Implant are essential tools to help women decide if, when, and under what circumstances to get pregnant. This is largely because these methods change the default from having to take constant action to avoid an unintended pregnancy (such as taking a pill every day) to having to take action to become pregnant (i.e., through removal of an IUD or implant).

In South Carolina, [50%](#) of all pregnancies were unintended (2010).

Nationally, [45%](#) of all pregnancies were unintended (2011).

[Research](#) recently conducted by The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy (The National Campaign) and [Smart Design](#), a national leader in human-centered design and innovation, suggests that improving communication about IUDs and the Implant—the words, images, and ideas—can have a significant positive impact on young women’s perception of these methods. In short, a significant shift in communication approaches to these methods is needed to counter existing misinformation, misperceptions, and concerns about IUDs and the Implant.

National Campaign/Smart Design Research on Improving Communication about IUDs and the Implant among Women Age 18-29

- Most women age 18-29 are unaware of the wide range of birth control options available.
- Effectiveness is expected—many believe that all methods of contraception are essentially equally effective.
- Side effects can be more important to young women than effectiveness.
- “Long-acting” is daunting and a barrier to adoption for many.
- Women often confuse IUDs and the Implant, but there are strong personal preferences attached to each.
- Communicating how it will feel for both women and their partners is vital.
- Women want to hear from other women.

See more at:

www.thenationalcampaign.org/resource/whoops-proof-birth-control

PILOT TESTING WHOOPS PROOF IN SOUTH CAROLINA

Based on the insights uncovered in The National Campaign/Smart Design research on IUDs and the Implant, a communications campaign—*Whoops Proof*—was developed to help women increase their knowledge of, and positive regard for, IUDs and the Implant. The *Whoops Proof* communications campaign is designed to be fully and easily customizable for states and communities nationwide. In 2016 the *Whoops Proof* communications campaign was pilot tested in South Carolina in partnership with the:

- [New Morning Foundation](#), [Choose Well](#) (a contraceptive care initiative of the New Morning Foundation),
- [Riggs Partners](#) (a South Carolina-based advertising, public relations, and communications firm), and
- the [Women’s Health Research Team](#), led by [Dr. Beth Sundstrom](#) at the College of Charleston, who led the evaluation of the pilot test.

The *Whoops Proof* communications campaign launched in 2016 as part of an effort the New Morning Foundation is undertaking statewide in South Carolina to improve people’s access to contraceptive care, including contraceptive methods like the IUD and Implant. Specifically, the Foundation is working on both the “supply” side (through clinics and providers) and the “demand” side (through customizing and implementing the *Whoops Proof* communications campaign as well as other information and education strategies).

An important part of the pilot test was getting clear on goals. That is, full understanding that the *Whoops Proof* ads were designed to increase women’s knowledge of and positive regard for IUDs and the Implant; not, for example, to increase use of these methods or clinic visits. In short, there was recognition and agreement that changes in behavior may be too ambitious a goal for a modest ad campaign in isolation.

Changes in behavior may be too ambitious a goal for a modest ad campaign in isolation.

Two communities in South Carolina—Spartanburg and Horry counties—were selected to receive the *Whoops Proof* campaign and two communities—Charleston and Lexington counties—served as the matched comparison communities¹ in the quasi-experimental design evaluation. Pre- and post-tests (1,439 and 1,534 responses respectively) were administered to women age 18-29. Participants were recruited through Facebook using a \$5 Starbucks gift card as compensation for their time. At post-test, the median age was 21. There were no statistically significant difference between overall demographics for the pre-test and post-test groups. Race/ethnicity broke out as follows: 86% were white/Caucasian, 10% black/African-American, 4.4% were Asian, and 2.3% were American Indian and closely matched the demographics of the communities examined. Seven in 10 participants reported having a sexual relationship with only men over the past 12 months; about six in 10 had completed some college or less; about

¹ Counties were matched but the same respondents were not followed over time.

PILOT TESTING WHOOPS PROOF IN SOUTH CAROLINA CONT'D

50% were either working full time or part-time; and the majority of participants reported a total household income of less than \$35,000 (27% earned less than \$10,000).

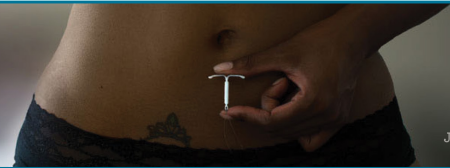
The specific hypotheses tested were straightforward: Women in the intervention counties (where the *Whoops Proof* ads were disseminated)—compared to those in comparison counties (where no ads were disseminated)—would:

- Be more aware of the *Whoops Proof* campaign.
- Be more likely to recall seeing or hearing messages about IUDs and the Implant.
- Report increased awareness of IUDs and the Implant.
- Have more positive attitudes toward IUDs and the Implant.

Those who recalled a *Whoops Proof* message—particularly those with repeat exposure to the campaign—would:

- Express more positive attitudes toward IUDs and the Implant.
- Seek more information about IUDs and the Implant.

The “your body is awesome
just the way it is” birth control.



JAYLA, 26

The *Whoops Proof* advertising campaign took place between July and October of 2016 and was administered by Riggs Partners. The campaign media budget totaled \$75,000; 70% was directed to digital media buys (such as Facebook), and 30% toward more traditional media (such as advertisements in college newspapers). Media channels were strategically selected to target women age 18-29. All the creative for the campaign was developed by The National Campaign and Smart Design and is available for use in other communities. One 30-second radio spot was developed by Riggs Partners and is also available. To localize the *Whoops Proof* campaign, WhoopsProof.org/SC was established as the campaign’s only call-to-action. The [Whoops Proof website](http://WhoopsProof.org/SC) is closely linked to The National Campaign’s Bedsider.org website. [Bedsider](http://Bedsider.org) provides additional information to visitors who wanted to learn about IUDs and the Implant in greater depth as well as access to myriad other relevant resources and information. As part of the effort in South Carolina, The National Campaign enhanced relevant clinic pages on Bedsider.org to provide increased information about the clinical services available in each of the two pilot test communities so that women could access clinical information in an easy and seamless way.

All the creative for the campaign was developed by The National Campaign and is available for use in other communities.

PILOT TEST FINDINGS

The evaluation of the *Whoops Proof* campaign, led by Dr. Beth Sundstrom at the College of Charleston, showed generally positive results. The primary finding was that those in the intervention counties who reported seeing the ads more than once a week were significantly more likely to report positive attitudes toward the IUD and Implant compared to participants in comparison counties.

Other evaluation findings include:

- Participants in intervention counties (Spartanburg and Horry) were significantly more likely to recall *Whoops Proof* messaging compared to participants in comparison counties (Charleston and Lexington).
- Participants in intervention counties were significantly more likely to receive contraceptive information from WhoopsProof.org compared to participants in comparison counties.
- Overall, participants did not report a significant increase in awareness of IUDs and the Implant. Although participants in Spartanburg and Horry Counties reported a combined 11% increase in familiarity with the IUD and Implant, this change was not statistically significant.
- Overall, there were no significant differences in women's attitudes about IUDs or the Implant.
- At post-test, participants more frequently utilized social media and other internet sources (61.3%) to find information about birth control, as compared to their use at pre-test.

There were also instructive findings from the [Riggs Partners](#) execution of the advertising campaign. They include:

- Messages that demonstrated an understanding of stressful realities of the audience's life and that also focused on positive body esteem and knowledge outperformed other ads. That is, they garnered a higher click through rate.
- In nearly every digital media channel, the campaign outperformed national and local comparison benchmarks. That is, users clicked on the *Whoops Proof* ads far more than an average ad in the specific media channel.
- Ads that performed best in Spartanburg and Horry counties also performed best in a previous pilot test in Tulsa, OK.
- The performance of ads featuring IUDs and those featuring the Implant were nearly identical.
- The campaign delivered over 7,000,000 total impressions across both target counties. Put another way, the *Whoops Proof* campaign had 20,465 users during the run of the campaign, equal to 43% of the estimated total target audience population within both counties.

PILOT TEST FINDINGS CONT'D

- WhoopsProof.org/SC received 20,465 users during the campaign, equal to 43% of the estimated total target audience population within both counties.
- The campaign generated more than 50,000 clicks on digital and social media ads.
- Facebook is clearly one of the most cost-effective and engaging channels to reach the target audience. During the campaign, Facebook's average cost per click (CPC) was \$0.21 (the USA average CPC of Facebooks ads in 2016 was about \$0.27), and its average click through rate was 3.05% (compared to about 0.9% nationally). Put another way, the percentage of times people saw the *Whoops Proof* ads and clicked on a link—and the cost to get these clicks—was far lower than the national average.

EIGHT KEY INSIGHTS FOR SUCCESS

INSIGHT 1. Repetition matters.

Changes in knowledge and attitudes occurred among women who had more frequent exposure to the ads (digitally or in an analog setting). The evaluation noted that participants who recalled seeing messages once or more per week were significantly more likely to agree or strongly agree that:

- the IUD is a good method of birth control;
- the IUD would make managing birth control easier; and that
- the Implant would make managing their birth control easier.

The “it’s totally nobody’s business but mine” birth control.



VALERIA, 21

INSIGHT 2. Bursts may work best.

There seems to be a fine line between engaging your audience and fatiguing them. Data collected for the *Whoops Proof* campaign suggest that audience engagement drops rather dramatically after a few months of exposure. On the other hand, as noted above, those who saw the ads once or twice a week were more likely to have changes in knowledge or attitudes. The takeaway? Burst campaign—relatively short and intense campaigns—may be best for effectively reaching your audience.

The “OMG it’s in my arm, but can still kick that sperm’s ass” birth control.



KIARA, 24

INSIGHT 3. What does lifestyle have to do with it?

The *Whoops Proof* ads that performed best were those that focus on positive self-worth and positive body image. The experience in South Carolina confirmed findings from earlier National Campaign/Smart Design research suggesting women want birth control that fits their lifestyle rather than the other way around. For example, our research made clear that the “long-acting” part of “long-acting reversible contraceptive” methods (that is, LARCs) is daunting and a barrier to adoption for many. Long term anything seems to take away the “now” generation’s freedom and flexibility. The idea of commitment often does not fit in with this audience at this point in their lives. At the same time, the women studied do not like to think of themselves as explicitly anti-commitment. That is why describing IUDs and the Implant as “low maintenance” methods made to fit this generation of young women seems to be so appealing.

EIGHT KEY INSIGHTS FOR SUCCESS CONT'D



The “I’d prefer not going through puberty again” birth control.

INSIGHT 4. The death of Facebook has been greatly exaggerated.

Of all the media channels used to advertise the *Whoops Proof* campaign—including desktop web banner ads, geo-mobile web banner ads, search engine ads, Twitter, Instagram, Pandora, and Spotify—Facebook was the top performer. Compared to nationally published benchmarks and local benchmarks from a previous South Carolina health advertising campaign, Facebook was the clear winner—cost-per-click for ads was far cheaper than any other channel and the number of people who clicked on *Whoops Proof* Facebook ads was nearly double that of the second-best performing channel. Facebook has two primary advantages: it is relatively inexpensive and it allows advertisers to more precisely target their efforts. Want to reach young women 18-29 in a particular zip code? Facebook can do that for you. And cheaply. In addition to the implementation in South Carolina, several communities have undertaken more modest pilot tests of the *Whoops Proof* campaign (including Cleveland, OH and Tulsa, OK) in different settings. In each situation, Facebook offered the most value for the investment when compared to other social media buys (such as Instagram and Pandora) and traditional media buys (such as billboards and newspaper advertisements).

The “his ninja sperm can’t touch this” birth control.



CHARLOTTE, 19

INSIGHT 5. If resources allow, consider a layered approach.

Consider implementing your ad campaign through different media—digital, radio—and potentially in other intervention settings (like clinics). Doing so allows for a more “wrap-around,” holistic experience for women. As noted above, dosage matters. Increasing the number of times that your target audience is exposed to the advertising increases your chances of a successful campaign.

The “it keeps up with me when my day’s cray” birth control.



DANIELA, 23

EIGHT KEY INSIGHTS FOR SUCCESS CONT'D

INSIGHT 6. Set reasonable expectations.

As noted earlier, it is essential to have a specific goal for your ad campaign. It is also important to remember that expectations for a communications campaign should be modest. In short, do not ask an ad campaign to do all the heavy lifting. That is, if the ultimate goal of your effort is changing behavior—for example, significantly increasing the number of women visiting clinics for birth control counseling—advertising alone is unlikely to change behavior. Quality advertising designed to reach the target audience with messages that have already been shown to resonate with them can make a real difference in changing knowledge and providing information that can, in turn, play an important role in changing behavior.

Changes in behavior may be too ambitious a goal for a modest ad campaign in isolation.

The benefit of an ad campaign, particularly one that relies heavily on using digital media, is that it can reach many people with a reasonable investment. The downside is that the interactions are brief and they are taking place in a very competitive marketplace of ideas and commercials and the like. Consequently, any expected changes in knowledge or beliefs (let alone behavior!) as a result of a stand-alone advertising campaign should be modest

INSIGHT 7. Ad campaigns + other activities; not either/or.

Consider ad campaigns as additions to other activities—not as the sole activity. It may go without saying but, if you are interested in helping women stay on track and avoid unintended pregnancy, advertising may be necessary but it is not sufficient. Advertising seems to work best when complemented by on-the-ground work; this work likely involves clinics, trusted community organizations, and additional outreach.

Ad campaigns in isolation are unlikely to change population level outcomes.

INSIGHT 8. Make new friends.

There are undoubtedly marketing and communications experts in your community who can help with implementation; perhaps an ad agency or an individual consultant. Either way, our experience suggests that others reach out to these experts for help setting up your ad campaign, monitoring the campaign as it unfolds, analyzing online analytics of your campaign and making adjustments as needed, and using these same analytic tools to provide some conclusions about the reach and effect of your ad campaign. Although bringing such expertise on board may add slightly to the costs, doing so will undoubtedly lead to a greater impact than trying to implement on your own.

LOOKING FORWARD

Whoops Proof is one of what we hope will be many ad campaigns that will be developed and shared to improve awareness of and positive regard for the full range of contraceptive methods. For those who are seeking to improve women’s knowledge of and positive regard for IUDs and the Implant specifically—and who do not want start from scratch or reinvent the wheel—we invite you to consider the existing Whoops Proof campaign piloted in South Carolina. We also recognize that improving knowledge of contraception is just the first step. In order to have sustained impact, we will continue to need high quality content and creative information that can capture people’s attention and provide them with the information they need about birth control.

ABOUT US

The mission of the [New Morning Foundation](#) is to improve the environment for and access to sexual and reproductive health education, counseling, and clinical services for all South Carolinians.

[Choose Well](#) aims to reduce South Carolina's rate of unintended pregnancy by ensuring that all South Carolinians have the power to make educated and intentional decisions about if, when, and how they choose to start a family.

Founded in 1996, the mission of [The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy](#) is to improve the lives and future prospects of children and families and, in particular, to help ensure that children are born into stable, two-parent families who are committed to and ready for the demanding task of raising the next generation.

[Riggs Partners](#) is an integrated marketing, advertising, public relations, and communications firm in Columbia SC. The agency specializes in responsible brands that align organizational culture and business strategy with brand marketing programs. It is the founder of the national CreateAthon network.

[Beth L. Sundstrom, Ph.D., M.P.H.](#) joined the Department of Communication at the College of Charleston in the fall of 2012 as an Assistant Professor specializing in Strategic Health Communication. She teaches undergraduate and graduate courses on such topics as strategic communication, social marketing, and health communication. Dr. Sundstrom received the 2016 ExCEL Award for Outstanding Faculty of the Year in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences.

APPENDIX

For the purposes of the South Carolina pilot test, all *Whoops Proof* ads were divided into several categories. The top two messages categories were those ads that (1) referenced positive body self-esteem or biological processes and, (2) those that referenced such realities of life as stress, and concerns about one's job. Those that garnered the most attention were in the first category were:

- 'Your body is awesome just the way it is' birth control."
- "Goodbye PMS' birth control."
- "I'd prefer not going through puberty again' birth control."

The top performers in the second category were:

- "Keeps up with my 5-job-interviews-in-one-day-cray' birth control."
- "It's ready-to-go 24/7 and knows me better than Netflix" birth control."
- "Epic love life / no drama' birth control."

As noted previously, the *Whoops Proof* campaign has an advertising media budget of \$75,000 was strategically allocated to target women age 18-29. The campaign media plan directed 70% of this budget to digital and social media tactics, and the remaining 30% was directed toward traditional media outlets. The campaign's length, budget, and advertising resulted in extremely strong saturation of both intervention counties. More than 7,000,000 total media impressions resulted in more than 50,000 clicks. The specific media channels used were:

- Desktop Web Banner Ads
- Geo-Mobile Web Banner Ads
- Search Engine Ads on Google / Yahoo / Bing
- Facebook Ads
- Instagram Ads
- Twitter Ads
- Pandora Digital Radio Ads
- Spotify Digital Radio Ads

Traditional Media

- Local FM Radio Ads (*with streaming digital value added where available*)
- College Campus Newspaper Print Ads

RECAP: EIGHT KEY INSIGHTS FOR SUCCESS

1

Repetition matters.

2

Bursts may work best.

3

What does lifestyle have to do with it?

4

The death of Facebook has been greatly exaggerated.

5

If resources allow, consider a layered approach.

6

Set reasonable expectations.

7

Ad campaigns + other activities; not either/or.

8

Make new friends.

