**Teenage Risk-Taking Behavior Segment**

Setting: A3NCN (Actual News & NOT News Commentary Network) Studios, New York City, NY

Anchors: Ed Zachly & Shirley True

Social Science Correspondent: Suzie Olyji

COMMERCIAL BREAK 2

BUMPER MUSIC 3, 2, 1…

ED: Welcome back. Do teenage brains *cause* teenagers to do dumb things? A recent segment on *CBS This Morning* suggested that teenagers’ *brains* are the cause of their risky behavior.

SHIRLEY: This, based on a survey of 5,000 teenagers and young adults from 11 different countries that indicates risk-taking behavior reaches its peak at the age of 19.

ED: So, is risk-taking behavior caused by underdeveloped teenage brains? And if so, why did my grandmother go skydiving last weekend? Here to help us understand the science is our Social Science Correspondent, Suzie Olyji. Hi Suzie. Welcome.

SUZIE: Hi Ed. Hi Shirley. Thank you for having me.

SHIRLEY: Glad you could join us. Let me just ask you first, do teenage brains cause teenagers to do dumb things?

SUZIE: The short answer is, no. From a developmental standpoint, teenagers can do anything most adults can do (Moshman 2011). As illustrated by Ed’s Grandmother, risk-taking behaviors are not unique to teenagers (Moshman 2011). David Moshman (2011), at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, argues there is no empirical evidence at all to even support categorizing teenagers separately from adults.

ED: Well, what about the results of this survey? If it isn’t their brains, what is it that causes such high risk-taking behaviors in teenagers?

SUZIE: Those are two very good questions. First, let me point out that none of the survey respondents ever had their brains physically examined so there can be no connections made between the results of the survey and physical brain development or activity. What can be learned from the survey is that risk-taking behavior is context dependent, meaning external and social factors play the biggest role.

SHIRLEY: Are you saying society is the cause of teenage risk-taking behavior?

SUZIE: It is possible that societal constructs have an influence, yes. During the *CBS This Morning* segment, Gayle King points out, and psychologist Lisa Damour further clarifies, that only 2% of teenagers in Indonesia reported trying alcohol within the last 30 days. This contradicts the argument that teenage risk-taking behavior is a matter of brain development. If teenage brains were the cause of risk-taking behavior, you would expect to see similar results across the board regardless of country. What we see instead are contextual differences. It should also be noted that drinking is not typically considered risky behavior for adults, so the context of the questions we are asking matters too.

ED: So, what does this mean? What can we do to minimize the impacts of risk-taking behavior among teenagers?

SUZIE: Well, there could be any number of potential ways to influence risk-taking behavior among teenagers. Alison Mueller (2005) has been working with troubled youth for over twenty years and based on her experience, teens that participate in volunteer work are less likely to exhibit at-risk behavior. When given the chance, troubled youth will rise to the occasion, discovering skills they did not know they had, or developing new ones (Mueller 2005).

SHIRLEY: It sounds like we need to re-evaluate our expectations of teenagers.

SUZIE: That is part of it. We also need to re-evaluate our understanding of what teenagers are capable of and find ways to challenge them. Blaming the teenage brain for risk-taking behavior cannot be the answer any longer. We need to challenge ourselves to find other solutions.

ED: Well, there you have it folks, the teenage brain does not cause risky behavior. Thank you so much for being with us Suzie.

SUZIE: Thank you for having me.

ED: We’ll be right back.

COMMERCIAL BREAK 3

**Reflection:**

I really liked the conversational nature of the original news segment. Breaking the information up with questions from news anchors makes the information easier to digest. This also frames the information being delivered giving it more context and meaning to the audience. I did not want to “interview” someone from the original segment because it might create a more confrontational tone that would distract from the information being shared. I also wanted the person delivering the information to be an expert. Delivering science information can be challenging because it is so detailed and specific. Care must be taken to explain the results of a study without leaving out important context. This type of reporting is especially important given the amount of misinformation and false reports that exist today. Clear science reporting is needed now more than ever.