

Worthy motives but unconvincing drama in film on drug abuse

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You can't fault Beth Polson's motives

The executive producer of the dramatic special *Not My Kid* (CBS, Tuesday, Jan. 15, 9-11 p.m.) first ran into teen-age and adolescent drug use when doing her Emmy Award-winning documentary "Getting Straight." In one of the drug "rehab" programs, she saw a 15-year-old girl with pigtails and braces tell tearfully about her use of alcohol, pot, downers, uppers, PCP, and LSD since she was 12 years old.

From then on, Miss Polson became determined that no parent would glibly sit back and say, "Not my kid." To prevent that detached, unconcerned attitude is the avowed purpose of her book and television special bearing that name

The result, however, bears some critical examination. That's because Polson, director Michael Tuchner, and writer Christopher Knopf have created a made-for-TV movie so focused on the problem they want to explore that they give us a world full of symptoms instead of three-dimensional people

"I chose the kind of family most people would say this couldn't happen to," Polson writes. "The father (George Segal) is a successful surgeon, an achiever, a good family man. The mother (Stockard Channing), who stays at home, loves her husband and children. Their two daughters are attractive, popular, involved in activities. Nothing bad could happen here.'

But, in fact, the worst does happen. Their daughter, Susan (Viveka Davis), gets sucked into a cycle of drug abuse and loses almost everything

"Not My Kid" begins in a drug rehabilitation program. One would assume it is patterned after the work of Polson's co-author, Dr. Miller Newton. Kids stand up in front of fellow drug abusers and confess to their use of a variety of drugs, as well as to the degrading behavior drugs brought them to.

Despite strong performances from Stockard Channing and Viveka Davis, as well as a less convincing one from George Segal, the family we meet here remains a mystery to us. We learn lots about the daughter's behavior, but little about her real self. Lines like "I'm not going to punish you, sweetheart; I never had to, you're too bright" don't bring us to the heart of the question

"Not My Kid" plays with popular psychology awhile in approaching the question, but it seems to miss the point. Drugs may be used by all kinds of people. But they are used for different reasons

What, then, is the specific complex of moral and emotional forces that brings this family into the drug vortex? We never really find out

The problem is not that "Not My Kid" says drug abuse can happen to such a family. It is that it never really explores why it could happen here before it lunges for a solution

In an attempt to create an Everyman, the special washes out the detailed emotional portraiture that makes for deeply convincing drama and good sociology.

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