



DEDICATED TO PROMOTING
MENTAL HEALTH

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Dr. George Gerbner
234 Golf View Road
Ardmore, PA 19003

*Called 8/15
Will exp. compl. draft
send to SM so Penn
SM to me.
if not in, call → David KEMNER*

Dear George:

Enclosed is a revised draft of the summary to the paper "A New Look at Anger in Television" for your perusal. I am very eager to enter the publication and presentation phase with the paper, and hope that you agree with the summary. If any changes are necessary, please call IMHI's Executive Director, Michael Benjamin.

Again, I enjoyed working with you and appreciated your help with this endeavor. Thank you and enjoy the rest of your summer.

Sincerely,

Suzanne

Suzanne Stutman
President

(mb)

SUMMARY

This project undertaken by the Indicators (CI) research team and the Institute for Mental Health Initiatives (IMHI) examined one critical aspect of entertainment programs: how do they depict anger, and how are the skills demonstrated to diffuse anger and to prevent violence? Although anger is omnipresent in television programs, and the culmination of anger scenes into violence still occurs, progress has been made in the depiction of anger management over the last ten years.

Before IMHI began its extensive campaign to bring about the integration of RETHINK skills in television programs, characters generally reacted to conflict with the fight or flight response. Of the 159 shows analyzed in this project, almost two thirds of the characters who expressed anger effectively managed it. Six out of ten prime time and four out of ten Saturday morning children's program characters use anger management skills in a conflict situation. IMHI recognizes that television shows which incorporate the skills of anger management can help to diffuse and prevent violence and emotional disorders in the public.

Contrary to the common view that exchanges of anger are uniformly negative expressions, constructive portrayals of anger can not only help to prevent violence, but also teach viewers to bring about positive changes in their lives. For example, anger can provide an opportunity to vent grievances, solve problems, improve emotional connections in relationships, and restore pride that has been reduced.

In this study, 121 prime time and 38 Saturday morning children's programs were analyzed on four different networks during the 1993-4 season. 26 percent of the characters analyzed expressed anger. Almost three fourths of all prime time programs and all Saturday morning children's programs contain anger scenes. Clearly, these programs offer an extraordinary opportunity to teach about anger.

Only 14.6 percent of anger scenes on prime time and 37 percent of anger scenes on Saturday mornings involve violence; thus shows frequently portray other manifestations of anger that are handled in non-violent ways. For instance, characters on Saturday morning children's programs are recognizing their anger 27 percent of the time, listening to the target of their anger 31 percent of the time, and occasionally use skills such as self-talk and finding humor in the situation. Analysis of prime time and day time television indicates that the incorporation of anger management skills into the programs does not decrease the Nielson ratings, as viewers are attracted to the skillful treatment of conflicts and to authentic emotional responses. Therefore both

the public and the media can benefit with the integration of RETHINK skills. The television industry can create exciting and popular shows while conveying messages to help maintain a healthy and less violent society.

Despite the progress made, greater variety needs to be shown in the kinds of people (race, class, gender, age) who get angry and who express their anger effectively. In the current study, television characters most likely to express anger were young, upscale, white males. There were far fewer examples of expressions of anger by people of color or lower class characters. More female characters used anger management skills, such as listening, reflecting on their anger, finding humor in the situation and talking to themselves, while more male characters used violence in a conflict situation. Female characters paid a higher price for becoming violent than their male counterparts.

Media professionals can improve the depiction of anger by portraying it as a tool for change. They can incorporate a greater variety of skills used to manage anger. Producers of Saturday morning children's programs might consider using more humor as a way of diffusing anger, in addition to portraying the consequences of violence, as neglecting to do so can have a negative influence on viewers. The public can voice their dissatisfaction with violent programming, and parents can use television to teach their children about the impact of violence and more appropriate responses to conflict and anger.

Researchers might continue to study the portrayal of anger and anger management on television programs, the demography of the characters who express anger, and the effects of such programming on viewers. It is also recommended that researchers further explore other issues, such as the physiological effects of viewing anger and violence, as well as the portrayal of sexual behavior in television programs.