

DEDICATED TO PROMOTING
MENTAL HEALTH

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George Gerbner
Professor and Dean Emeritus
The Annenberg School For Communication
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Dear Dr. Gerbner:

Thank you for your latest report and the information it provided. In response, we have some comments, but would first like to clarify IMHI's mission and brief history, to clear up some confusion you have about our goals. In the final report, the background that IMHI brings to this project must be as clear as that of the Cultural Indicators research team.

Since the incorporation of IMHI in 1982 as a not-for-profit organization, we have been dedicated to the promotion of mental health and the prevention of emotional disorders. We have established a distinguished history of working with professionals in the entertainment industry to utilize the media as a resource for positively influencing behaviors in viewers. Our efforts have always focused on *primary* prevention, which differs from the "therapeutic or counseling effort" you referred to on page two of the report.

After crystallizing the research on anger and creating our materials on anger management (now published), we launched our campaign against violence, focusing on promoting anger management as a viable prevention against poor mental health and violent behaviors. We began informing the media community about our efforts by hosting seminars for the creative community. In 1985 we hosted a roundtable session on "Anger and the Drama of Human Emotions" in Malibu, California, with twenty prominent members of the television industry, creators of prime-time programs, decision-makers and script writers. We conducted follow-up seminars with the media in California following the roundtable session, which included a workshop with the Caucus for Writers, Producers and Directors, NBC and many others.

In 1985 and 1986, in order to establish baselines, we conducted content analyses of the depiction of anger on prime-time television and daytime drama. Four to five years later, we conducted follow-up studies. I believe we sent you the papers describing the results of these analyses. For these studies we created the guidelines for defining categories of anger portrayed on TV. These categories are those which we outlined for you as you began this project, that you used as you conducted the research on anger. We would appreciate your referencing these categories and our past research.

In addition to IMHI's participation in numerous conferences concerning issues relating to mental health and the media, continuing seminars and workshops, our quarterly publication for the entertainment industry entitled *Dialogue: Insights into Human Emotions for Creative Professionals*, we have consulted extensively with groups such as Hanna-Barbera and the Turner Entertainment Network, Fox, ABC, NBC, etc. to develop media literacy programs, create training guides for parents, and provide experts to appear on their programs on media violence. With professional societies such as American Psychological Association, National Association of Social Workers, and the Orthopsychiatric Association, we have conducted panels

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and anger management training programs. One published description of these activities appears in Innovations in Clinical Practice: A Source Book (Keller & Heyman Eds., 1991).

These types of events characterize IMHI's interactions with the social science community as well as the entertainment industry. We now continue our second decade of service working *with* the media, to provide helpful information without endangering creative freedom. Ultimately, our goal is to promote the mental health of the general public. So, with a rich and long history of working with the media and in influencing how anger is portrayed in television and in film, we were most eager to work with you so that we could continue to enhance our work to assess our impact in this important area.

Your report has provided us with important information from which we will formulate ideas for ways the entertainment industry can more effectively portray depictions of anger management. We also would like to thank you for including examples of episodes which contained situations where specific anger management skills were utilized. These examples give us a more concrete understanding of how each skill was operationalized in your study. We disagree, however, with many of your interpretations and have some comments to share with you.

You argue that ratings are a function of time slots and program line-ups. We maintain that there is also some relationship between ratings and the quality of programming, that authentic depictions of feelings and emotions will grab and keep audiences. Ratings reflect viewers' preferences. Thus, it *is* informative to compare ratings with constructive portrayals of anger management to search for a correlation between programs utilizing anger management in their scripts and their ratings. A positive relationship will provide support to our argument that viewers are drawn to three-dimensional characters and constructive portrayals of human interactions. At the least, we would like to be able to make the point that these favorable interactions with anger management do not get in the way of strong ratings and program success, that in fact, violence alone is not the only "sell."

In fact, in the section on *Expressing Anger*, your findings reveal that 85.4% of anger scenes in prime time and 63.8% of anger scenes in Saturday morning children's programs *do not* involve violence. These fairly high percentages provide us with encouragement that, in fact, the opportunity to teach skills that viewers can ultimately model *does* exist. In this way we see television as a powerful and positive potential tool by which to encourage constructive uses of anger and responsible behaviors.

We would like to clarify our understanding of what constitutes an "effective" anger management portrayal. You wrote that "effective" in drama depends on the dramatic purposes and in a dramatic context. We are not seeking to define "effective" portrayals in terms of dramatic purpose. We would say that constructive use of anger management skills would constitute an "effective" portrayal. We would apply the same standards for what is considered "effective" resolution in real life to fictional program scripts. Television has an enormous impact on its viewers. Social learning theorists such as Albert Bandura state that people adopt many of their behaviors and responses through *observational learning*. This process involves *modeling* behaviors observed in other people in one's environment, including fictional characters portrayed on television. Therefore, what we mean by an "effective" dramatization is one that is no less stimulating and captivating to the viewer, but one that also provides realistic and adaptive examples of resolution that can be modeled and utilized in one's daily interactions.

As we review your findings in the *Demography of Anger* section, we question your conclusion that female characters in major roles in Saturday morning children's programs are the "angriest group on television." Looking at the data presented in table 2, there is only a 4% difference between the male and female characters. We question whether a 4% difference is a statistically significant disparity?

We had some question regarding the use of the Script Archives to obtain illustrative material. Could you clarify what type of observations were gathered from the script analysis? Why were the scripts utilized in

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this way? Also, why were the results of the script analysis not included in the tables? Would it also be possible to have access to the script data used in this study?

We are especially interested in the anger scenes, 33% of which portray anger as directed at a friend or member of the family. You report that half of the situations escalate into violence. Research has shown that expression of anger in real life frequently leads to improved relationships (Averill, 1982). Do the scriptwriters show this? We also see 10% of anger scenes resulting in improvement as a positive result. This finding reveals that there is some resolution and growth being portrayed in television. In situations where this resolution is established, we would like to compare ratings of the corresponding shows to examine the relationship between this positive portrayal of human interaction and program ratings. Unfortunately, the limited nature of the sample used does not allow for a reliable relationship to be determined. One show from a particular program is an inadequate sample for our purposes. Yet, access to the scripts would enable us to elaborate our point.

In the example scenes included to illustrate the various manifestations of anger, no reference is made to how the scenes were resolved, if at all. How do the angry interactions play out? If the scene shifts, do the characters come back together? How do they interact in their next scene? In the scene cited from "Northern Exposure," we would be surprised if no resolution was achieved as this particular program generally attempts resolution, or at the very least *struggles* with resolution, in most of the episodes.


A disparity apparently exists between your interpretation of the incidence of attempted resolution and how we view the findings. (It may be analogous to looking at the data as an optimist and a pessimist). If 60% of prime time and 40% of Saturday morning children's program characters attempt resolution as you report, then we see this as a very *positive* result. We find these results encouraging and consistent with our efforts to help entertainment professionals incorporate constructive expressions of anger and resolution of conflicts into their scripts, that in fact, they are learning from us.

We are pleased that you were able to meet the majority of our needs. However, we would now like to acquire the scripts used in this study so that we may determine what resolutions are achieved and how they are achieved. This would help us with the question of what "effective" outcomes are, in our terms.

We now plan to draft a report, integrating your findings with those of our four previous studies, to be made available to the creative community as well as the general public. If this report is agreeable to you, we will agree to release it under the co-authorship of IMHI and yourself. We would then finalize our contract with a payment of \$10,000. Another option is for us to assume the responsibility to write a separate report under our name, citing your work. In this way you would be free of the obligation of co-authorship of the final report. In this situation, we would pay you the \$5,000 we owe you for your work up to this point. Please let us know how you wish to be involved.

Thank you for conducting this study on behalf of IMHI. We hope that through these efforts we can come to share a more common view of these findings, or in the least, agree to disagree. We certainly appreciate your efforts and look forward to collaborating on other projects in the future. Please call us with any questions you may have.

Sincerely,


Rhoda Baruch, Ed.D.
Chair of the Board


Suzanne Stutman, M.A., M.S.W., B.C.D.
President

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