

3 pages

THE ANNENBERG SCHOOL FOR COMMUNICATION

UNIVERSITY of PENNSYLVANIA

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Dear Suzanne:

Thank you for your and Rhoda's letter and comments of November 1. I have substantially revised the first draft I sent you. The revised draft follows.

The sample represents 159 programs or approximately 100 hours of analysis, distributed by network and genre as noted in Table 1. Every anger scene was analyzed, amounting to a total of 1,014 anger scenes from all 122 programs that contained anger scenes. All data tabulated in the Appendix was from the 1993-94 season. The script archive was searched for illustrative material and some additional observations. A random selection of 13 scripts containing anger scenes and 48 angry characters (out of 306 total character population) was analyzed for those purposes.

We conducted a pre-test during the coder training period in order to refine training and instrument and to optimize reliability of observations. However, we did not have the time or funds to conduct double-coding of the sample.

After the holidays I can try to get you a list of programs (we are moving our office and all files and data are in transit), if really necessary. But please note that "constructive" expressions are not legitimately codable in drama. Is anger concluded by agreement to rob a bank constructive? Or knocking out an angry person who lunges at you with a knife destructive? For such and most other examples we found (and cite in the report), no such judgment can be reliably or legitimately made.

Furthermore, as you know, ratings have little to do with program quality but reflect mostly the size of audience at the time they are aired, the lead-in program, and what plays opposite. Therefore, I believe that any focus based on a presumptions of relationships between ratings and any program quality, let alone anger management, would be misleading. It is possible to find what you might consider constructive resolution, no matter how rare, atypical, and aired at a good or bad time, by viewing and searching widely just for such expressions. That, of course, is not the purpose of a representative study.

I have now included examples of specific expressions and resolution to illustrate some typical configurations. No particular programs stand out as containing anger management skills. Remember that in one season's sample each program typically has only one episode.

The instrument of analysis is what we sketched in previous correspondence. It included all reliably observable management skills. Some of the labels involve groups of skills, noted in the report.

Outcomes of anger scenes, a such, were rare; the action goes on toward a final plot resolution that has only a remote relationship, if any, to an anger scene. Insofar as there were outcomes, they are reported. Associating the variety of outcomes with the variety of expressions would have reduced frequencies to the trivial but increased the volume of the report perhaps five-fold. The same goes for the correlations between expressions of anger and the demography of characters. It would certainly be an interesting effort to study these issues with a much larger sample over a much longer time.

The 85.4 percent of anger scenes that do not involve violence are included in the other tables.

What are effective anger management depictions depends on for whom they are to be considered effective. They are all effective in terms of the objectives and fate of characters whom they characterize. "Effective" in drama, unlike life, depends on dramatic purposes and in a dramatic context; that is the only basis for reliable coding. Coders cannot be allowed to speculate about what might be effective if a type of expression or resolution could be transferred to another situation in real life. The same can be said for judging whether a situation improves or not. Improvement in a dramatic conflict depends on whose point of view is taken. In most cases, as we report, there is no change as a consequence of anger management; the change, and/or resolution, comes about for other reasons such as force, superior insight, planning, or luck determining the outcome.

We looked at substance use and found no substantial difference in anger between users and non-users. Substance use or abuse has dramatic functions of characterization that rarely relate to anger in any particular way. That is why in the revised draft I omitted the tabulation about smokers; it did not reveal anything significant.

As I note in the report, television shows mostly what any effort for improvement is up against. Characters pursue purposes given to them by the writers, and they are typically not therapeutic; heroes justify the means they use, and negative characters make even "positive" skills

seem destructive. The translation to real life has to be made by the therapist, not the content analyst.

The most important result of this study will be a clear and realistic representations of the formulas typically used by writers, and an attempt to help them change, or at least vary, these formulas. A single minor change in the stereotypic formulas this study reveals would have the preventive impact of a thousand modifications of individual scripts.

That is why I hope that this study can be combined with the results of your previous efforts to accomplish both the "retail" improvements and the "wholesale" preventive changes.

I look forward to our further collaboration toward making this contribution to your important work as useful as possible.

Sincerely yours,



George Gerbner

P.S. Report follows, 13 pages.