

PORTRAYAL OF ANGER IN PRIME TIME PROGRAMMING
A PILOT CONTENT ANALYSIS

DRAFT REPORT

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As part of a project whose aim is understanding television's depiction of anger, by the Institute for Mental Health Initiatives (IMHI), a pilot content analysis was conducted using a sample of 13 scripts of prime time programming. The study is modeled on similar studies conducted by researchers at The Institute of daytime dramas (1986 and 1990). In those studies, the IMHI found that the depiction of anger as potentially positive and anger management skills effective in handling anger well, was comfortably healthy. The results of this pilot study suggest that anger is not handled as well in prime time programming.

Sample

The 13 scripts—chosen for the diversity of topics they portrayed—all aired within the first 34 days of the years 1990, 1992, and 1993. More than half (62%) of the scripts aired during the first week of January; the remaining programs (38%) aired during the following three weeks.

The scripts are from shows of various genres, including situation comedies, serial dramas, and non-serial dramas. Some of the scripts are from half-hour shows; others from shows of one hour in length.

While the sample for this pilot content analysis is small, its findings suggest that anger is often a dramatic element in television programming.

METHODOLOGY

The units of analysis are each expression of anger (for purposes of assessing the consequences of the anger portrayed in the sample) and each angry character. The angry character is defined as the initiator of the angry expression. Targets of the anger who respond with anger of their own are not counted as angry characters. An expression was

deemed to be an "angry expression" through a combination of assessing the circumstances in which the expression took place, noting instances where the script directions describes the "tone" with which dialogue is spoken, or describes a character's demeanor. For example, instances where a character is described as yelling at or insulting another character, or using or threatening violence, are considered expressions of anger.

THE RESULTS

Angry Character

As Table 1 illustrates, angry characters comprise only 16 percent of the total population of characters in the 13 scripts, a small number compared to the total number of characters. A significant finding is in the gender breakdown of angry characters. Women characters are angry in a higher proportion to their population representation in this sample. White male settled adults, television's most oft-appearing characters, are not surprisingly the characters who most often express anger.

Villians in this sample were never the angry character. Most often the angry character's role was neither the hero nor the villain, rather characters whose roles were "mixed, unclear" were most frequently angry.

Alcohol played an almost non-existent role in the angry expressions analyzed in this pilot, appearing only 2% of the time. There was only one incidence of a racial slur uttered by an angry character.

Table 1

**Portrayals of Angry Characters in
12 Aired Scripts of Various
Prime Time Television Shows - Januarys 1990—1993**

	13 Prime Time Shows: <u>All Characters</u>	
	N	%
Total Population (Angry and Non-Angry)	306	100
Females	107	35
Males	199	65
Angry Characters	48	16
Females	15	31
Males	33	69
Black	1	2
White	47	98
Adol./Pre-Adol.	1	2
Young Adults	2	4
Settled Adults	44	92
Elderly	1	2
Hero, Good, Positive	15	31
Mixed, Unclear	33	69
Alcohol	1	2
Verbal Abuse	23	48
Racist	1	2
Violent	25	52

Expressions of Anger

As Table 2 indicates, the target of the anger was most often a close relative or close friend (48%), followed by a colleague (28%), and a stranger (24%).

Table 2

Portrayals of Anger and its Consequences
in 11* Aired Scripts of
Prime Time Television Shows - Januarys 1990—1993

	<u>All Angry Expressions</u>	
	N	%
Total Angry Expressions	28	100
EFFECT		
Stay Same	4	14
Improve	3	11
Deteriorate	23	82
OUTCOME		
Constructive	2*	7
Other Character Angry	8	29
Violence	16	57
Cannot Code	2	7
TARGET OF ANGER		
Close Relative or Friend	10	36
Colleague	6	21
Stranger	14	50
OLD OR NEW ISSUE		
Old	4	14
New	26	93
RELATIONSHIP ALTERED?		
Yes	10	35
No	16	57
NATURE OF ALTERATION		
Positive	2	7
Negative	7	25

Anger's impact on relationships in this sample suggests that anger usually is prompted by a new rather than old situations. Although anger did not alter the basic relationships of angry characters and the targets of anger in the majority of cases, in those cases where some change occurred it was most often a negative change.

SUMMARY

On the whole, nighttime television's depictions of anger, as suggested by this pilot study, are not constructive or useful for problem solving. Anger most often precipitates a deterioration in the relationship between the angry character and the target of the anger, who is usually a close friend or relative.

However, the anger in this sample almost never took on racist or sexist tones.