

February 12, 1996

Katherine Williams, Ph. D.
7315 Wisconsin Ave. Suite 300E
Bethesda, Maryland, 20614

Dear Katherine:

Enclosed is Progress Report No. 1 for the "Violence Prevention Leadership Support" project. This is a partial report of preliminary results. As noted in the report, the work is proceeding according to schedule. The demographic and dramatic analysis, now underway, promise interesting and fruitful insights about the dynamics of ATOD use and violence on television.

We are eager to complete this phase of the work but cannot afford to continue to incur expenses without payment. We have billed DSG for \$9,318.94 for work done in April, May, and June, and we were paid for that work. We have billed DSG for \$8,002.06 for work done in July, August, and September, but we have not been paid for that work.

We are about to bill DSG another \$3,478 for work done to date. In order to be able to continue the work, write a progress report that covers all the work done during the last period, and prepare for the final report, we need to receive the last two payments, a total of \$11,480.06, within the next two weeks. We cannot afford to carry the payroll longer than that, and we don't want to risk losing staff and time to other fully paid-up and pressing projects.

I know that this is not your responsibility, but I am asking for your help and advice. Please discuss the situation with Alan Bekelman, and advise me if this matter can be promptly expedited, if I should call Alan myself, or if I should turn to Steve Gardner for further advice.

Call me if you have any questions or wish to discuss any part of this letter or report.

With best regards,

George Gerbner
Director, the Cultural Indicators Project
Founder and Chair, the Cultural Environment Movement

VIOLENCE PREVENTION LEADERSHIP SUPPORT

A Progress Report
February, 1996

By
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and Sheila Witherington

This progress report is in two parts. Part I deals with the research component and Part II with the distribution and outreach component of the project.

PART 1: THE RESEARCH

The focus of the research is on the representations of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs (ATOD) in television network prime time and Saturday morning children's programs, with special emphasis on the relationships between ATOD and violence. The analysis is limited to the 1995 spring television season.

The sample is composed of 80 prime-time dramatic (fictional) programs, including 1,393 characters, 366 violence scenes, and 293 ATOD scenes (i.e. scenes in which ATOD appear in any context); 15 "reality" shows, including 118 characters, 20 violence scenes, and 10 ATOD scenes; and 20 Saturday morning children's programs, including 238 characters, 150 violence scenes, and 6 ATOD scenes (see Table 1).

Analytical issues to be addressed include (1) the frequency of representations based on current and available trend data; (2) evaluative (positive, negative, neutral) and other tendencies and contexts of the representations; (3) the geography, demography, and action structure of substance use; (4) the connections between ATOD and violence.

The work so far included the taping and preparation of the Spring 1995 television program sample, the development of the appropriate instruments of analysis and administrative procedure for coding the sample, and the coding and the beginning of the analysis itself. The Tables at the end of this section present some preliminary results of the analysis, subject to revision and interpretation in the final report.

The final report will focus on the potential health implications and media policy issues suggested by the analysis, especially as they relate to youth and other high-risk populations.

It is important to note that this is a bare-bones account without interpretation. Many of the findings are suggestive of meaningful and significant interpretation. However, further analysis is needed, and the extension of the database to provide a broader base for reliable interpretation would be highly desirable.

The prevalence of ATOD

A high proportion (71%) of programs mention or show alcohol or tobacco or illegal drugs. Eleven percent of the programs are coded as having an ATOD theme as a significant or the major focus of the program. A viewer is presented with an "ATOD SCENE" nearly five times per hour or nearly four times per program in prime-time dramatic programming (see Table 1).

Feature films aired on television contain almost twice as many ATOD scenes as other programs. Situation comedies feature less than half (two scenes per program). (Table 2). ATOD scenes in Saturday morning children's programs occur about once in every three shows. [Nejat - why not includes this as bottom line in Table 2, rename other as prime-time cartoons.]

Characters

Eleven percent of all dramatic characters use ATOD (see Table 1). When broken down classified in four categories (Tobacco, Alcohol, Illicit Drugs, and Prescription/OTC drugs), the proportions are 2.4%, 8.2%, 0.4%, and 1.1% respectively (see Table 3).

These numbers mean, for example, that the average viewer encounters about 29 different users of alcoholic beverages and one or two (1.5) illicit drug users every week of typical television viewing. This is by far the largest single source of information about drugs to which the general public is regularly exposed.

The nature of that exposure has significant health and social implications. Television tells its viewers that only a small proportion of ATOD users are likely to be addicted (3.4% of tobacco users, 2.6% of alcohol users, and none of the illicit drug users in our current samples are shown or characterized as addicted).

In fact, on the whole, ATOD use is presented as a matter of little consequence for the user. Alcohol users are especially free of any health problems; less than one percent suffer negative health effects but 10% experience have positive social rewards from drinking.

Heroes and villains

In general about 6 to 7 percent of all characters (including, of course, mostly non-users) play both clearly positive roles ("heroes") and clearly negative roles ("villains"). However, ATOD users are more likely to be cast as heroes than non-users (Table 4).

When it comes to villainy, smokers and other legal drug users are twice as likely as non-users to be cast as villains. On the other hand, drinkers are less likely to play evil roles, and none of the illicit drug users was portrayed as a villain. It is clear that since tobacco commercials were went off the air, smoking has declined on television and has become an act of negative characterization rather than "normal" behavior, like drinking. It is less clear why users of prescription and OTC drugs should have a high rate of negative characterization. (The reasons would become more evident with an expanded sample and further demographic analysis.)

The relative good fortune of ATOD users shows up when we look at the ratio of positive and negative characterization. The number of villains for every 10 heroes among non-users is 9.4, a fairly even ratio. But the same ratio of villains for every 10 heroes among ATOD users is significantly less (between 5.0 and 6.2), except again for smokers whose chances of being cast as villains rather than heroes is the highest.

The dynamics of characterization sets the stage for the portrayal of violence.

Violents and victims

One out of four ATOD users commits violence. This is about twice the non-users' proportion of perpetrators of violence (Table 5).

Illicit drug users are the most violent (33.4 percent), followed by drinkers (26.1 percent), while only 12.8 percent of non-users commit violence.

However, when it comes to the risks of committing violence (i.e. the number of victims of violence for every 10 perpetrators), ATOD users are less likely to pay the price than non-users. For every 10 violent non-users, there are 13.8 non-user victims. But for every 10 violent ATOD users, there are only about 10 victims, the same number, except for 19.9 for the users of prescription and OTC drugs. So while drinkers, smokers, and illicit drug users commit violence with relative impunity, the users of pharmaceuticals carry the highest

risk of relative victimization in a violent encounter, twice the drug users' ratio.

Scenes

An ATOD scene is defined by the visual presence or mentioning of tobacco, alcohol and other illicit or licit drugs. A scene starts when the substance appears or is mentioned, and ends when it is no longer mentioned or shown. The same scene may include several different substances.

Typical viewers watching one channel at a time see an "alcohol scene" an average of every 23 minutes. Tobacco is made available every 54 minutes, followed by illicit drugs every 77 minutes. On the whole, an ATOD is presented an average of every 12.5 minutes.

The frequency of occurrence is inversely proportional to the significance of the substance in the scene (Table 6). Alcohol is the most "casual" ATOD, followed by smoking. They are more often than not presented in passing, without any significance to the story line. In contrast, illicit drugs (and to some extent prescribed and over the counter drugs) are observed to be more essential to the narrative.

The substances that are more casual, alcohol and tobacco, are also visually depicted (rather than merely "mentioned") in over a third of the scenes (Table 6). When these casual substances are visually present in the scene, they are also highly likely to be consumed.

Illicit drugs in prime-time have a significant narrative functions, but they are visually presented in only 14.6 percent of the cases, and never as being actually used. However, a fifth of the illicit drug scenes show the characters as "intoxicated."

More than half (54 percent) of the illicit drug scenes show drugs being traded and 14.2 percent are also linked with violence before or during the scene.

Further demographic and dramatic analysis of themes, characters and scenes will provide a basis for the interpretation of results.

TABLE 1: SUMMARY OF ATOD IN PRIME TIME DRAMATIC PROGRAMS
 SPRING 1995

PROGRAMS			
TOTAL number of programs in prime time:	80	100%	(61.5 hours)
ATOD coded as "significant" or "major" focus:	9	11%	
Number of programs that contain ATOD SCENES:	57	71%	
Average number of ATOD scenes per program:	3.7		
Number of ATOD Scenes Per Hour:	4.8		
CHARACTERS			
TOTAL number of characters (Major & Minor)	1,393	100%	
Number of ATOD using characters	156	11.1%	

TABLE 2: SUMMARY OF ATOD IN PRIME TIME DRAMATIC PROGRAMS BY GENRE, NETWORK
 SPRING 1995

	AVERAGE NUMBER OF ATOD SCENES	NUMBER OF PROGRAMS
TOTAL	3.7	80
Genre		
feature film	9.0	2
TV movie	5.4	5
TV dramatic (fictional)	5.3	25
cartoon	5.0	7
situation comedy	2.0	41
Network		
CBS	4.4	11
FOX	4.4	28
ABC	3.5	21
NBC	2.6	20

*** Percentage of total n of users in the first column.
 **** Percentage of characters who use the substance in question
 and, in the case of users of more than one type of substance,
 identified by the coder as the "most important" as far as health
 or personal/social consequences are concerned.

TABLE 4: ATOD USERS AND HERO/VILLAIN
 PRIME TIME, ALL CHARACTERS

	N total	% Heroes	% Villains	Number of Villains for every 10 Heroes
Illicit drug user	6	16.7	0.0	no villain
Prescr. & OTC	17	23.5	11.8	5.0
Drinker	115	9.6	5.2	5.4
ANY ATOD-USER	156	11.5	7.1	6.2
NO ATOD	1,236	6.5	6.1	9.4
Smoker	33	9.1	12.1	13.3
All Characters	1,392	7.0	6.3	9.0

TABLE 5: ATOD USERS AND VIOLENCE/VICTIMIZATION
PRIME TIME, ALL CHARACTERS

	N	total%	Perpetrators	% Victims	Number of Victims for every 10 Violents
Drinker	115		26.1	25.2	9.7
Smoker	33		18.2	18.2	10.0
Illicit drug user	6		33.4	33.4	10.0
ANY ATOD-USER	156		24.3	25.6	10.5
NO ATOD	1,237		12.8	17.6	13.8
Prescr.& OTC	17		17.7	35.3	19.9
All Characters	1,393		14.1	18.6	13.2

TABLE 6: DISTRIBUTION OF ATOD SCENES
PRIME TIME

		TOBACCO	ALCOHOL	ILLICIT	PRESCR.& OTC
Substance is Present*	N	68	163	48	42
	%	23.1	55.3	16.3	14.2
WHEN THE SUBSTANCE IS PRESENT:**					
Substance is Significant in scene		39.7	28.2	72.9	47.6
Substance is Mentioned only		17.6	23.9	85.4	61.9
Shown		82.4	76.1	14.6	38.1
Substance consumed in scene		78.0	56.5	0.0	60.0

* Percentages are of the total (295) ATOD scenes.

** All percentages under this line are of the total number for each substance, as presented at the top of each column, except for the item about "consumption versus holding," where the percentages are of those scenes that actually "show" the substance rather than just "mention."