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Annenberg Public Policy Center Receives Grant to Study 'Culture of Health' on Top Television Shows

Focus to include Spanish-language programs

PHILADELPHIA – (January 15, 2016) – After years of studying popular entertainment’s depiction of risky health behaviors – including violence, sex, and alcohol and tobacco use – the [Annenberg Public Policy Center](#) (APPC) of the University of Pennsylvania will begin to examine a “Culture of Health” as portrayed on popular television shows.

The policy center has been awarded a three-year, \$745,000 grant from the [Robert Wood Johnson Foundation](#)® to identify trends on TV that reflect a Culture of Health, including “social cohesion,” “respect for difference” and “pro-health and well-being messages.” Building a Culture of Health is a fundamental goal of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

In addition, the policy center will expand its media studies of both risky and healthy behaviors to embrace programming of particular interest to African-American and Hispanic audiences. The latter includes Spanish-language telenovelas (soap operas) and “narco-novelas” (crime dramas), as well as the English-language shows adapted from them.

“Portrayals of risky and healthy behaviors in popular entertainment can be very influential, especially to young people,” said [Patrick E. Jamieson](#), Ph.D., the director of APPC’s Adolescent Health and Risk Communication Institute. “TV portrayals can affect our nation’s increasingly diverse audiences’ attitudes and behaviors in helpful or harmful ways, and the CHAMPION project will allow for a better understanding of such influences.”

The policy center’s [CHAMP](#) database – the Coding of Health and Media Project – has coded health-risk portrayals in more than 900 movies and 1,600 hours of television programming spanning more than a half-century. The original project was funded by a five-year grant (2005-2010) from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. With this new funding and expansion of the content analysis, the project will be renamed CHAMPION – the Culture of Health and Media Portrayal in Our Nation – and examine media for positive as well as negative health portrayals.

Such positive portrayals on TV shows will include markers of a healthy lifestyle (such as exercise and family meals); healthy behavior and messages (seatbelt use, designated drivers, anti-drug messages); respect for difference (cross-racial and cross-ethnic relationships); and signs of social cohesion (positive parent-child interactions).

Jamieson, who directs the CHAMPION program, noted that growth in the Hispanic population made up more than half of the U.S. population increase from 2000 to 2012, and Univision was the No. 1-rated prime-time network among all 18- to 34-year-olds in the July 2013 and July 2014 sweeps. African-American and Hispanic audiences watch more TV than the U.S. adult average, according to 2015 Nielsen data. And “Empire,” the show about an African-American family in the music business, was the breakaway hit of the winter 2015 TV season.

Past studies from CHAMP data found that:

- [Suicide depictions](#) in top-grossing films have increased steadily since 1950, along with the rise in youth suicide from the 1960s to 1990;
- Male characters have [consistently outnumbered](#) female characters 2-1 in top-grossing films since 1950;
- The rate of [gun violence](#) in the most popular PG-13 movies tripled from 1985, the first full year of the rating, through 2012, and in 2012 exceeded that of R-rated films, while the overall rate of violence in the top 30 movies more than doubled since 1950;
- Americans’ [fear of crime](#) is predicted by the amount of violence portrayed on prime-time TV dramas;
- The [declining visibility of tobacco products](#) on prime-time broadcast TV declined in parallel and correlated with the national decline in cigarette consumption.

[The Annenberg Public Policy Center](#) was established in 1994 to educate the public and policy makers about the media’s role in advancing public understanding of political and health issues at the local, state and federal levels.

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