

ASK YOUR TELEVISION IF DRUGS ARE RIGHT FOR YOU: MESSAGES ABOUT DRUGS, ALCOHOL AND TOBACCO ON TELEVISION

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There have been several studies documenting the nature of illicit drug use and abuse in television programs as well as the effect that messages about drugs, alcohol and tobacco might have on children and teens (Austin, 2000; Borzekowski & Strasburger, 2008). However, few content analyses have included messages about *legal* drugs in television programs and commercials. Yet these messages are prevalent, especially in TV commercials advocating over-the-counter and prescription drugs to treat illnesses or other reasons (e.g., to lose weight, stay awake or go to sleep). The current study represents a content analysis of messages about or related to alcohol, cigarettes, and drugs (including legal drugs) shown on television across four decades. Samples were taken from the CRETV Archive at Ithaca College for 1986, 1996, 2006, and 2016, including content from both fiction and nonfiction programs, TV commercials for medicines and alcoholic beverages, and public service announcements. Messages were coded as negative (ANTI), positive (PRO), or non-aligned (NEUTRAL), based on the portrayal and/or verbal statements made during the scene or commercial. The findings show that pro-drug and pro-drinking messages greatly outnumber anti-drug and anti-drinking messages; for cigarettes, however – which are not advertised on television – there were more anti-smoking messages than pro-smoking messages and do not have enough significance in television programs to create a conclusion. Variations by program type (i.e., audience) and year are also reported.