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Alcohol Storylines in Television Episodes: The Preventive Effect of Countering Epilogues

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Abstract

This experimental study assessed whether alcohol television storylines impact youth drinking attitudes and intentions and whether corrective epilogues can potentially moderate this impact. Television episodes were professionally produced to depict heavy drinking leading to either positive or negative consequences. The pro- and anti-alcohol episodes were shown alone or with an epilogue where a main character discussed the deleterious effects of excessive drinking. Attitudes toward drinkers and drinking intentions were measured subsequently, along with reactions to the episode and demographic data, among participants aged 14–17 using an online study. Exposure to the pro-alcohol episode was related to more positive attitudes toward drinkers. Including an epilogue after a pro- alcohol episode was related to more negative viewers' attitudes toward drinkers and lower drinking intentions compared to a pro- alcohol episode with no epilogue. By contrast, including an epilogue after an *anti*-alcohol episode was unrelated to attitudes toward drinkers or drinking intentions. Viewing a single television episode with a pro-alcohol message may lead to more positive attitudes toward drinkers. The finding that a brief epilogue may reduce the impact of the pro-alcohol storyline suggests easily implemented preventive strategies to counter the adverse impact of substance use portrayals in entertainment programming.

Keywords

alcohol; media; adolescents; health promotion; narrative persuasion; identification

Alcohol frequently appears in programming directed at youth audiences and alcohol consumption is often positively depicted on television (Bergamini, Demidenko, & Sargent, 2013; Dal Cin, Worth, Dalton, & Sargent, 2008; Gruber, Thau, Hill, Fisher, & Grube, 2005;

Gunasekera, Chapman, & Campbell, 2005; Sargent, Tanski, Gibson, 2007). Moreover, alcohol is one of the most actively placed product categories in television (TV) programs and movies; such placements are often part of marketing efforts designed to associate alcohol brands with aspirational characters and lifestyles (Russell & Belch, 2005). These omnipresent alcohol depictions continue to raise concern among policymakers, healthcare providers, and public health advocates about the adverse effects that exposure to them may have on maladaptive alcohol use. In particular, embedded alcohol messages and depictions of drinking in media content viewed by younger audiences have drawn scrutiny and led the government and public health advocates to consider strategies to counter the potential influence of such media messages (USHHS, 2007).

Evaluating the effect of a single narrative TV episode is difficult because the treatment of alcohol in media narratives is rarely entirely positive or entirely negative (Russell & Russell, 2009). Yet, even a single exposure to a storyline about alcohol can affect audiences' beliefs about the consequences of heavy drinking; for instance, viewing an episode of the TV program *ER* that depicted alcohol poisoning after a drinking game led to more negative attitudes toward those games and to greater intentions to take an intoxicated friend to a hospital or to call an ambulance or parent (Bavin & Owens, 2016). Adding to this developing body of evidence, this study was designed to investigate whether embedded alcohol messages in a TV narrative can contribute to youths' drinking intentions and their attitudes toward drinkers, with the expectation that these predispositions may ultimately influence alcohol consumption. To this end, TV episodes that replicated real programming and integrated different embedded alcohol messages were developed to allow a controlled assessment of their impact on young viewers. The experiment further assessed whether epilogues containing counter messages could remediate the impact of these embedded messages.

Alcohol in TV Programming

TV remains the primary source of entertainment for today's youth, who watch an average of over 18 hours per week (Nielsen, 2014). Young people's susceptibility to storylines and characters that serve as a source of referential learning about adult behaviors, including substance use, make programming content a concern (Russell, Russell, & Grube, 2016; Strasburger, Jordan, & Donnerstein, 2012). Content analyses have found alcohol to be present in all top-rated primetime series, including those popular with youth; for instance, US situation comedies display alcohol at an average rate of 6:56 minutes per hour (Russell & Russell, 2009).

Despite their omnipresence, the impact of alcohol messages in TV series on youths' drinking attitudes and intentions is difficult to isolate because stories often intermix positive and negative consequences. Alcohol may be associated with having fun or partying, but some storylines also display drinking in a more negative light, such as depicting characters getting sick or doing something they regret (Russell, Russell, & Grube, 2009). Moreover, studies assessing cumulative exposure to TV cannot definitively establish the causal effects of exposure to specific messages. Only a controlled experimental approach can provide convincing evidence of the impact of exposure to a single TV episode on youths.

Process of Influence: Narrative Persuasion

Narrative persuasion refers to the development and change of attitudes and intentions as a result of processing narrative messages that are not overtly persuasive. Unlike directly persuasive communications, messages embedded in the content of novels, videogames, TV series, or movies, are not carefully evaluated by receivers as arguments. Instead, the mechanisms that underlie the persuasiveness of these narratives involve receivers transporting themselves into the narrative (Gerrig, 1993; Green & Brock, 2000). A meta-analysis of narrative transportation research found that when stories include characters with whom viewers can identify and plots that are imaginable and realistic, viewers will transport themselves into the story world (van Laer et al., 2014).

Narratives are especially persuasive when readers or viewers identify with the characters, as identification allows the projection of oneself onto the other and promotes vicarious experiences of the social reality inhabited by the characters (Cohen, 2001; Russell, Schau & Crockett, 2013). The ensuing self-referencing process leads to the adoption of attitudes and beliefs that are consistent with what the characters in the story experience (Escalas, 2007). The empirical evidence to date shows that the more viewers are immersed in the plot line and the characters, the more story-consistent attitudes and beliefs emerge (Green & Brock, 2000). The process of narrative persuasion is particularly relevant to understanding the impact of alcohol-related stories on youth, given that young characters who engage in drinking tend to be aspirational ones with whom viewers can easily identify (Russell et al., 2009). Importantly, this framework suggests interventions that might counter pro-alcohol narrative persuasion influences.

Countering Alcohol TV Portrayals

Counter-advertising, especially in the form of Public Service Announcements (PSAs), is frequently used as a tool for moderating the impact of media on vulnerable audiences (Agostinelli & Grube, 2002; Babor, 2010). PSAs convey messages that attempt to change audiences' beliefs and behaviors; however, PSAs are usually presented as standalone messages unconnected with the stories they are intended to counter (Dunlop, Cotter, Perez, & Wakefield, 2013; Fishbein, Hall-Jamieson, Zimmer, Haeften, & Nabi, 2002).

Narrative research shows that pieces of information organized in a temporal and connected manner are processed in a macro-structure that allows a causal inference within elements of the storyline (Bruner, 1990; Stein & Albro, 1997). Therefore, a PSA that breaks the flow of a narrative may not be processed in the same macro structure. In contrast, a PSA that is thematically and narratively connected to the content of the story it is designed to counter might be more effective (Stein & Albro, 1997). Consistent with this argument, a prior study found that a PSA with a message about the dangers of drinking and driving led to less favorable attitudes toward drinking and driving if it followed an episode that depicted a drinking-related accident, but it 'boomeranged' (led to more positive attitudes) if it followed a thematically unrelated control episode (Moyer-Gusé, Jain, & Chung, 2012).

This line of reasoning suggests that public health messages would be more efficacious if placed adjacent to the messages that they are attempting to moderate and if they are narratively connected to the targeted storyline. As characters play a central role in the flow of a narrative, a counter message's efficacy might be further enhanced if presented by a character from the episode (Adnsager, Austin, & Pinkleton, 2001; Moyer-Gusé, Jain, & Chung, 2012). Therefore, a preventive epilogue presented by a protagonist from the story should be more effective to counter a narrative depicting only positive consequences of heavy drinking. A character speaking directly to the audience to correct misrepresentations of positive consequences that can happen when one drinks heavily would be a form of truth-telling designed to deconstruct the character by making him or her "come clean" (Shapiro, Barriga & Beren, 2010). Such an epilogue should affect the ways in which viewers relate to the character and the perceived realism of the storyline. Although an epilogue that reinforces the story's message may increase viewers' identification with the character (Moyer-Gusé, Jain, & Chung, 2012), an epilogue designed to counter the story's message is likely to reduce it. An epilogue that emphasizes that the episode is fictional should also make the story seem less realistic because the viewers are better able to critically think about the trueness of the depicted consequences (Shapiro, Barriga & Beren, 2010). Based on existing narrative persuasion research, lesser identification with the story's protagonist and lower perceived realism should reduce a narrative's ability to influence viewers' attitudes and behaviors (Escalas, 2007; Green, 2004).

Hypotheses

This study reports a between-subjects experiment to test the theoretical prediction that youths' drinking attitudes and intentions will be affected by viewing a single TV episode depicting positive or negative outcomes of drinking. The experiment is designed to assess the differential impact of pro- and anti- alcohol storylines with and without a public health video epilogue that features one of the main characters in the episode and that is counter to the pro-alcohol narrative's storyline.

The video episodes feature fictional characters whose experiences with alcohol might alter young viewers' attitudes about drinkers and their intentions to drink. A viewer may perceive drinkers more positively and have more favorable intentions toward drinking in the future when the narrative depicts teens having fun drinking alcohol and behaving positively after drinking. Conversely, when the narrative shows realistic negative outcomes of drinking, then one's views of drinkers should be more negative and intentions to drink in the future should be lower.

H1:

A TV episode depicting positive outcomes of drinking (pro-alcohol episode) will lead viewers to hold more positive attitudes toward drinkers (H1a) and greater intentions to drink in the future (H1b) than a TV episode depicting negative outcomes of drinking (anti-alcohol episode).

Given the potentially adverse impact of exposure to a story depicting positive outcomes of drinking, the research also assesses the potential for a public health epilogue to alter the

episode's impact by featuring a character from the episode who communicates the potential negative consequences of drinking for young people. Based on narrative persuasion research, a character stating that 'what you see on TV is not real' should lessen the degree to which viewers identify with the story's protagonist and the degree to which the narrative itself is perceived as realistic. In turn, such an epilogue should reduce the influence of a alcohol narrative on viewers' attitudes and intentions.

H2:

Viewers' attitudes toward drinkers (H2a) and intentions to drink in the future will be lower when a public health video epilogue featuring a main character from the episode follows a pro-alcohol episode than when there is no such epilogue (H2b).

H3:

The degree to which viewers identify with the main character (H3a) and the degree to which the story is perceived as realistic (H3b) will be lower when a public health video epilogue featuring a main character follows the episode than when there is no such epilogue.

Method**Stimuli Development**

Experimental TV episodes with different alcohol narrative valence (pro- or anti-alcohol) were produced, using a theatre methodology, which replicates the TV program context but also allows control of the storyline. The authors developed a film script and engaged a professional university-based film director to assemble student actors and crew and produce a filmed narrative. Different versions of the storyline were created to manipulate the valence of the consequences of the drinking behavior. The film was edited to 18 minutes and formatted for high-quality online streaming. The plot is outlined in Appendix A.

The narrative follows a teen, Tom, in a series of events leading up to a beach party where he and his friends are seen drinking heavily with other teens. In line with youth-oriented social marketing research, both pro- and anti-alcohol narrative versions emphasized the social consequences of the behavior (Pechmann, Zhao, Goldberg, & Reibling, 2003), showing the main character acting nicely or meanly toward others while under the influence. In the pro-alcohol version, Tom behaves charmingly, 'gets the girl,' and wins entry to a film festival; unbeknownst to him, the festival director is the girl's father, thus facilitating entry in the festival. His drinking is part of a storyline that ends on a positive note. In the anti-alcohol version, Tom behaves loutishly toward Katie, the romantic interest. She scorns him for his behavior while drinking and, after word of his misconduct gets back to her father, the festival director, Tom fails to advance in the competition. Here, drinking leads to the protagonist's downfall.

Forty-second video epilogues were also produced that featured either Tom, the male protagonist, or Katie, the female protagonist, speaking about the consequences of drinking for young people. The actors stayed in character for the epilogues. Per prior research on the most promising approaches for PSAs, the message emphasized the social outcomes of

drinking (Fishbein et al., 2002). Epilogues following the pro-alcohol story began with “what you see on TV is not real. In reality, alcohol changes your behavior in a bad way, it makes you do things you might regret” and epilogues following the anti-alcohol story began with “as you saw in the episode...” and the remainder of the message was the same. All epilogues concluded with “you do not need to drink to have fun and fit in.”

Participants

The study was conducted with youth aged 14–17 contacted via their parents using a nationally representative commercial research panel (MarketTools, 2009; SurveyMonkey Audience, 2013). The research company maintains panels representative of the US population in terms of gender, race, ethnicity and socio-economic status. This is achieved by comparing panel members’ demographic data to US Census Bureau data. Following the best practices in online panel research, demographic quota cells are predefined in the survey programming so that only the desired number of respondents in each cell is invited to participate (Callegaro et al., 2014).

To promote participation, panelists earn points redeemable for goods from partner organizations. In addition to Institutional Review Board adherence, the organization complies with International Chamber of Commerce and European Society for Opinion and Market Research guidelines, which require parental consent and youth assent for participants under the age of 18. The company contacted adult panel members with teens aged 14–17 and briefed them about the study. Parents were told that their children would watch and react to a newly produced TV series episode that contained storylines related to heavy drinking. Upon obtaining parental consent, the teen participant received an email invitation. Assent was obtained on the survey site where respondents were presented with a form that outlined the nature of the study. Once assent was provided, participants completed the study on a secure website. Upon completion, participants were debriefed and offered an opportunity to pose questions to the researcher using a confidential form.

Of the parents contacted, 80% provided their consent and 96% of the teens assented. 762 teens (50.1% males) participated in the study, with all age categories represented equally. The sample was ethnically diverse with 79.3% White/Caucasian, 11.0% African American, 4.6% Asian American, 1.6% Native American, and 10.7% Hispanic (multiple categories were allowed). The sample was also diverse socioeconomically with 29.2% perceiving their family being as well-off compared as other families, 24.0% worse-off (below scale mid-point), and 46.8% better-off.

Procedures

Participants were randomly assigned to watch an episode presented as a new TV pilot. Each participant viewed either the pro- or the anti-alcohol episode with or without a public health epilogue, according to the 2 (episode valence) $\times$ 2 (no epilogue /epilogue) experimental design, and counterbalancing the gender of the presenter in the epilogue. Sample numbers ranged from 174 to 198 in each condition with no differences in age or gender distribution. The videos were streamed online and participants completed the self-paced online survey after viewing the episode.

The videos were pretested in a similar age group to ensure that reactions to the plot and characters did not differ by story valence. Measured reactions to the episode in the pretesting phase were the same as those used in this study: attitude toward the episode, perceived realism, and identification with the main characters. Both pro- and anti-alcohol episodes generated equally positive overall attitudes toward the episode itself and did not differ in identification levels with the main characters or perceived realism.

Outcome measures.—The survey assessed attitudes toward drinkers and drinking intentions. Participants were asked “What do you think about people who drink alcohol?” on a 5-point semantic differential scale: Good - Bad, Unappealing - Appealing, Uncool - Cool, Unattractive - Attractive, Boring - Fun, Dumb - Smart ($\alpha = .71$). The respondents’ drinking intentions were measured by asking them to indicate “In the next year, how likely it is that you will”: Drink alcohol, Drink several alcoholic drinks in a row, Drink enough to feel drunk (1- not at all likely to 5- very likely). These indicators form a reliable overall measure of alcohol drinking intention ($\alpha = .95$) that predicts subsequent drinking behavior (e.g., Chen et al., 2005).

Reactions to story and characters.—Attitudes toward the episode were measured on a three-item scale (The episode was engaging; I enjoyed watching the episode; I liked the episode) anchored by 1 – definitely not and 5 – definitely yes ($\alpha = .95$). Perceived realism was measured with three items (The episode felt real; What happened to Tom was realistic; This gave an accurate picture of real life) anchored by 1 - not at all and 10 - very much ($\alpha = .92$).

Participants indicated their identification with each of the two protagonists on a five-item scale (anchored by 1- Strongly disagree and 5- Strongly agree): I really identified with... [Tom/Katie]; It could have been me instead of him/her in that story; I could feel what Tom/Katie was feeling; I was able to get inside his/her head; I knew what Tom/Katie was going through (Cohen, 2001; Tal-Or & Cohen, 2010; $\alpha = .94$).

Covariates.—Sensation-seeking (6-item; Hoyle et al., 2002) and trait reactance (7-item; Russell et al., 2015), two individual characteristics known to predict youth alcohol behaviors, were included. Participants reported the number of hours of TV they watch on an average weekday and weekend to control for overall weekly TV viewing (O’Guinn & Shrum, 1997; Rideout et al., 2010). Finally, year of birth, gender, race/ethnicity, and grade in school were collected. Subjective Socio-Economic Status (SES) was measured by asking respondents’ perceptions of how well off their family is compared with other families (0 to 10), a measure commonly used with adolescent respondents (Goodman et al., 2001). Missing values for the weekly TV viewing items ($N = 59$) and the SES measure ($N = 10$) were imputed using an expectation-maximization procedure.

Results

Table 1 reports means and standard deviations of the covariates and outcome variables for each experimental condition. T-tests conducted in the two control conditions (no epilogue) reveal that attitudes toward the episode did not differ between the pro- and anti- alcohol

narrative, $t(370) = .49$, $p = .62$, and nor did they differ on perceived realism, $t(370) = 1.82$, $p = .07$. The pro- and anti-alcohol narratives were thus equally realistic and engaging. Similarly, levels of identification with the main character did not differ in the pro- or anti-alcohol narrative control conditions, $t(370) = .85$, $p = .40$. There were a few differences in sensation seeking or reactance by condition, as reported in Table 1, but they did not interact with the experimental conditions in predicting the outcomes; they were thus treated as covariates in the analyses. Age, gender and ethnic/racial background did not differ significantly different by condition.

Analytical strategy.

Drinking attitudes and intentions were regressed on episode valence, epilogue presence, and their interaction. A hierarchical approach was used, with the main effects entered in a first model, and the interaction added in a second model. The regressions controlled for age, gender, race and ethnicity, subjective SES, sensation seeking, reactance, and weekly TV viewing. The interaction term was not significant; as such, only the main effects models are presented in Table 2. Specific hypotheses were tested using planned comparisons.

Consistent with H1a, planned comparisons of means reveal that viewers held significantly more positive attitudes toward drinkers after the pro- alcohol episode than after the anti-alcohol episode, $t(190) = 3.50$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.51$. Consistent with H2a, including an epilogue after a pro- alcohol episode was related to more negative attitudes toward drinkers compared to a pro- alcohol episode with no epilogue, $t(190) = 3.82$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.55$. The pro-alcohol narrative without an epilogue was related to significantly more positive attitudes toward drinkers when compared with all other conditions, $t(190)s > 3.50$, $ps < .001$, $ds = 0.50$, whereas the pro-alcohol narrative condition with an epilogue did not differ significantly from the two anti-alcohol narrative conditions, $t(190) = .95$, $p = .34$ and $t(190) = .32$, $p = .75$.

The analyses of drinking intentions revealed that H1b was not supported as there was no significant difference between the pro- and the anti-alcohol episodes for drinking intentions, $t(190) = .36$, $p = .72$. However, as predicted by H2b, viewers' drinking intentions were lower if a pro- alcohol episode was followed by a corrective epilogue than in the absence of an epilogue, $t(190) = 2.68$, $p = .008$, $d = 0.39$. In contrast, drinking intentions did not differ when an epilogue followed the episode depicting negative consequences of drinking compared to the no-epilogue condition, $t(190) = 1.25$, $p = .21$.

The likely mechanisms underlying these effects were examined by testing whether viewers' evaluations of the episode and characters in the story varied as a function of the characters' appearing in the epilogues. As reported in Table 3, regression analyses of the reactions to the story using the same set of independent and control variables as in the primary analyses reveal a main effect of the epilogue presence qualified by an interaction with episode valence for attitude toward the episode ($p = .054$) and for identification and a cross-over interaction (with no main effects) for perceived realism. As the baseline means in Table 1 indicate, identification with the main character, perceived realism, and overall attitudes toward the episode were most favorable when the viewers were exposed to an anti-alcohol story reinforced by an epilogue. Identification with the main character and perceived realism

were lowest when a pro- alcohol episode was followed by a corrective epilogue. As predicted, seeing and hearing a main character in a ‘what you see on TV is not real’ epilogue significantly lowered the degree to which viewers identify with that character (H3a) and the degree to which the story was seen as realistic (H3b). These effects may help explain the epilogue’s ability to generate less positive attitudes toward drinkers and to reduce drinking intentions compared to a pro- alcohol episode without an epilogue.

Discussion

This study provides evidence that youths’ perceptions of drinkers are more positive following a TV episode with a pro-alcohol storyline than following an episode with an anti-alcohol storyline. The finding that exposure to positive portrayals of drinking in entertainment content, even in a single episode, may contribute to the development of positive alcohol-related attitudes reinforces the concerns of policymakers, healthcare providers, and public health advocates who have called for both closer monitoring of the content of media portrayals and corrective action to palliate their detrimental impact (Bergamini, Demidenko, & Sargent, 2013; Mosher, 2012).

Public Health Implications

This research indicates that featuring a character from the episode in an epilogue may significantly reduce the effect of a pro- alcohol storyline on drinking-related attitudes and the degree to which viewers identify with the story’s protagonist and perceive the drinking-related narrative as realistic. From a prevention standpoint, this underlying mechanism suggests a straightforward approach to correcting the impact of positive images of drinking on TV. In order to effectively correct media-based portrayals of substance use, PSAs should be narratively connected to and immediately succeed the content they are designed to correct. In the age of streaming media and viewing-on-demand, this is easy to operationalize.

It is noteworthy that placing a public health epilogue after an anti-alcohol storyline did not have any apparent impact on drinking-related attitudes and intentions. This is a reminder not to overuse public health messages when the context in which they appear already displays substance use negatively, especially with a generally skeptical youth audience (Fishbein et al., 2002; Pechmann & Wang, 2010). Intuitively, epilogues might bolster an already negative alcohol narrative. This study’s findings suggest caution in using epilogues that convert the inherent, natural message in an anti-alcohol story into too explicit a persuasive appeal. Instead, it may be prudent to leave negative depictions unaddressed so that narrative persuasion can run its course.

Strengths and Limitations

This research offers evidence that exposure to a single alcohol media depiction can affect youths’ attitudes about alcohol. This is the first known study that experimentally compares pro- and anti- alcohol storylines and offers controlled evidence of their impact on the attitudes and intentions of youthful viewers. However, a single, required exposure to an entire episode only approximates natural viewing conditions, and calls for replications

across other substance contexts and audiences as well as extensions with multiple exposures. Another limitation is that effects could only be compared across experimental conditions with positive and negative alcohol story lines, inasmuch as there was no control episode depicting no alcohol consumption. The reliance on posttest measures does not allow an examination of change in youths' attitudes or intentions and alternative interpretations of the pattern of results cannot be ruled out.

Notwithstanding the study's ability to generate and detect differences in the degree of identification with the characters after a single episode, it is recognized that identification with characters in a TV series also develops over time, and that exposure to multiple episodes would further increase levels of identification. Further research is warranted to assess whether the effects get larger or smaller when tested with an ongoing series and characters with whom viewers have developed stronger parasocial connection (Russell et al., 2004).

Conclusion

Alcohol remains amongst the most abused substances and a leading cause of preventable injuries and death for those under age 21; as such, new efforts are required to address this general burden to society (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2011; Eaton et al., 2010; Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2013). This research offers suggestions for a strategic approach to counter the influences of media portrayals, especially for youth. Although tested in the context of alcohol, the findings have applicability for other maladaptive behaviors (e.g., smoking, bullying) that might be depicted in a positive light in a storyline.

The results suggest that epilogue-based prevention strategies may counter the effects of embedded messages about maladaptive behaviors in media content. In order to have the greatest impact, such corrective public health messages should be narratively connected and placed adjacent to the content that portrays the behavior in a primarily positive light. Importantly, these findings suggest that epilogues do not detract from the enjoyment of the program, even though they can counter the impact of a positive alcohol narrative on youth's drinking-related attitudes. These findings should help allay the concerns sometimes expressed by TV producers and writers that such epilogues may undermine the entertainment value of their programming.

APPENDIX A STORYLINE & SYNOPSIS OF FILMED NARRATIVE

Dramatis personae	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tom, the protagonist, a high school student • Katie, Tom's romantic interest • Mr. MacArthur, a teacher of Tom's • Hera, a female friend of Katie's • Mitch and other male friends of Tom's • Other youths present at the party
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	• Mr. Madera, director of the competition (and Katie's father)	
Story setup	Tom gets good news from his teacher: his work is a finalist in a prestigious competition, the winners soon to be announced. Mitch says he should come to the annual Senior Ditch Day party to celebrate. Tom gets interested when he learns Katie, whom he aspires to get to know, will attend. A montage shows Tom getting compliments on his competitive entry, and also flirting more intensively with Katie.	
Beach party	Lively scene at the beach Friday night. Tom and his friends begin drinking the champagne one has brought. Repeated scenes of heavy drinking and carousing. Tom boldly walks over and kisses Katie, to cheers from his friends. Party continues.	
Alternative endings	Pro-Alcohol (Drinking Leads to Positive Outcomes)	Anti-Alcohol (Drinking Leads to Negative Outcomes)
Common to both:	Saturday morning, Tom goes to an appointment to learn the results of the competition, Tom realizes from a nameplate that the director of the competition, Mr. Madera may be Katie's father.	
Next day	Mr. Madera <i>warmly</i> delivers the <i>good news</i> about Tom's <i>winning</i> entry to the competition, and also <i>speaks favorably</i> of his character "based on last night."	Mr. Madera <i>coldly</i> delivers the <i>bad news</i> about Tom's <i>failing</i> to get into the competition, and also <i>speaks negatively</i> about his character "based on last night."
Party flashback	Katie and her friend Hera are arguing about leaving. Tom drunkenly walks over and <i>charmingly</i> persuades them to stay, to Katie's evident <i>gratitude</i> .	Same scene, but now Tom acts the <i>mean drunk</i> , and <i>cold heartedly</i> tells Katie's friend Hera she's not wanted there. He has to be pulled away by Mitch, as Katie looks <i>sad</i> .
Final scene after news from Mr. Madera	Tom and Katie seen holding hands and looking happy.	Tom seen sad and alone.
Intended story Implication	Drinking alcohol is how successful teens have fun. It leads to easy socializing and romantic success.	Drinking alcohol causes failure. Teens who drink lose out on romantic companionship and become lonely and sad.

Note: approximately 18 minutes in length

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Table 1

Unadjusted Baseline Means (Standard Deviations) By Condition

		Episode Valence Condition			
		Negative alcohol narrative		Positive alcohol narrative	
		No Epilogue (Control)	Epilogue	No Epilogue (Control)	Epilogue
Control Variables	Cell size	174	198	198	192
	Sensation seeking	2.82 (.60)	2.81 (.58)	2.79 (.59) ^a	2.91 (.61) ^a
	Trait reactance	2.97 (.57) ^a	3.03 (.54)	3.00 (.54)	3.10 (.53) ^a
	TV hours / week	25.56 (4.71) ^{a, b}	24.10 (5.22) ^{b, c}	24.07 (4.94) ^{a, d}	25.65 (4.36) ^{c, d}
Dependent Variables	Drinking Intentions	1.88 (.58) ^a	1.81 (.54)	1.86 (.54) ^b	1.72 (.52) ^{a, b}
	Attitude toward Drinkers	2.49 (.32) ^a	2.45 (.30) ^b	2.60 (.31) ^{a, b, c}	2.48 (.31) ^c
	Identification with main character	2.86 (.54) ^a	3.10 (.50) ^a	2.96 (.54) ^a	2.71 (.49) ^a
Reactions to Episode / Characters	Perceived realism	7.23 (.69) ^a	7.52 (.72) ^{a, b, c}	6.74 (.68) ^{a, b}	6.14 (.64) ^{a, c}
	Attitude toward episode	3.46 (.35) ^{a, d}	3.67 (.35) ^{a, b, c}	3.40 (.35) ^b	3.37 (.32) ^{c, d}

Note. Within each row, means with common superscript are significantly different from each other; $p < .05$.

Table 2

Regression Results for Attitudes toward Drinkers and Drinking Intentions

Dependent Variable:	Attitudes toward Drinkers				Drinking Intentions			
	Unstandardized B	SE	t	Sig.	Unstandardized B	SE	t	Sig.
(Constant)	1.195	.206	5.795	.000	-.706	.340	2.075	.038
Episode Valence	.052	.048	1.093	.275	-.101	.079	-1.272	.204
Epilogue Present	-.111	.048	-2.303	.022	-.069	.080	-1.087	.037
Sensation Seeking	.298	.035	8.479	.000	.411	.058	7.087	.000
Reactance	.030	.038	.776	.438	.234	.063	3.711	.000
Child Year of birth	.015	.027	.541	.588	.133	.045	2.988	.003
Child Gender	.034	.048	.695	.488	.165	.080	2.070	.039
TV Hours / Week	.003	.002	1.634	.103	.005	.003	1.690	.091
Subjective SES	.027	.013	2.104	.036	.009	.021	.438	.661
R ²		.170				.192		

Note. Ethnicity and race were not significant. They were retained in the analyses but are not reported.

Table 3

Regression Results for Reactions to the Episode and Main Character

Dependent Variable:	Attitude toward Episode			Identification with Main Character			Perceived Realism		
	Unst. B	SE	T	Sig.	Unst. B	SE	t	Sig.	t
(Constant)	2.077	.323	6.424	.000	.839	.351	2.390	.000	6.808
Episode Valence	-.021	.120	-.170	.865	.161	.116	1.388	.166	-1.749
Epilogue Present	.234	.121	1.932	.054	.271	.116	2.333	.020	1.244
Episode Valence × Epilogue Present	-.325	.168	-1.931	.054	-.626	.162	-3.862	.000	-2.751
Sensation Seeking	.106	.062	1.726	.085	.289	.059	4.889	.000	.948
Reactance	.048	.067	.711	.478	.147	.064	2.283	.023	1.195
Child Year of birth	.028	.047	.594	.552	-.010	.045	-.217	.828	.138
Child Gender	.164	.085	1.940	.053	.126	.081	1.554	.121	.362
TV Hours / Week	.015	.003	5.335	.000	.020	.003	7.315	.000	5.475
Subjective SES	.106	.062	1.726	.085	.040	.021	1.865	.063	.693
R ²	.061			.179			.094		

Note. Ethnicity and race were not significant. They were retained in the analyses but are not reported.