

Teacher to Teacher

T.V. ADS AND BIOLOGY

For the past several years I have been using TV advertisements as takeoff points for discussions of various aspects of scientific method and objectivity, the sociology of health and disease, and certain aspects of human behavior. This technique is based on something with which students are thoroughly acquainted, but it leads into things with which they are not so familiar. It seems evident that many have never given a moment's thought to how commercials operate because TV has been such a pervasive influence in their lives. I think that students should consider TV ads more closely.

This commentary by Paul Goodman in *Growing Up Absurd* (1960, Random House, New York) is apropos to my approach:

Consider the men and women in TV advertisements, demonstrating the product and singing the jingle. They are clowns and mannequins, in grimace, speech, and action. And again, what I want to call attention to in this advertising is not the economic problem of synthetic demand, and not the cultural problem of Popular Culture, but the human problem that these are human beings working as clowns; that the writers and designers of it are human beings thinking like idiots; and the broadcasters and underwriters know and abet what goes on Alternately, they are liars, confidence men, smooth talkers, obsequious, insolent, etc., etc.

It seems that little has changed since Goodman wrote these words, even though the ad writers are getting a little more cagey. But how often does a person really go into an almost orgasmic response over a cup of coffee—or toilet paper!

In trying to heighten my students' awareness of the weaknesses of television advertising claims, I record the commercials on tape and then have them typed. In this way I get the exact wording used by the huckster. In class, I first apologize because I cannot provide them with the music and pictures of scenery, fancy rooms, virtually naked girls, people grinning so hard their faces must ache, and other props television provides. Then I read the scripts aloud, telling the students to simply listen to the words. The reading is varied from monotonous to animated in order to produce the desired effect. Properly done this can bring down the house.

I then invite the students' commentary on the ads. It is not at all difficult to point out the obvious fallacies in the way the peddler uses terms like "proof," "leading clinic," "best," "superior," "we want you to know," "double strength," "twice as fast," "you need," "that doctors prescribe most," and so on (ad nauseum).

"Natural" really gets kicked around. There is no such thing as a natural laxative you can get out of a bottle. Some bakeries like to brag about their natural ingredients and fail to mention the unnatural artificial preservatives they use. Anything added to hair can only make it more unnatural and certainly cannot make it more "alive."

Some oil companies would have you believe that their main business is raising waterfowl. How could a contest run by a dog food company tell you that their dog food contains meat? That's what the man said. A detergent maker says his stuff is like a box of fresh air and sunshine for your clothes. I'd like to see fresh air and sunshine climbing out of his box. One color TV is said to have such acrobatic color that it reaches out and grabs your eye. All of us who have been wondering when a boy becomes a man now know that it's when he takes a water ski jump and, best of all, can now eat a particular breakfast cereal. We even have chewing gum packages growing on trees, a real botanical wonder. Science has nothing whatever to do with cleaning vinyl floors. Technology does, but not science. A beer ad says it has been born wet and clear. I wonder what its parents look like. A hair spray pitch says it's anonymous, meaning without a name, but the ad surely does name it, over and over. Another hair gunk maker wants you to be the girl with the hair, but it seems virtually all girls have hair without the stuff. And are hair sprays harmless? A man peddling coffee tells me he knows I'm fussy about my coffee. How does he know that? I don't even drink it. A woman says that she knows that I know all about the pain and suffering of hemorrhoids. How can she presume I have piles? I do not. A tomato paste is claimed to have a taste so thick you can cut it with a knife. Taste has thickness? It would appear that some eye drops are less significant than the dropper they come in. Can the dropper ease your sore eyes? And a spot remover ad tries to establish its honesty by first admitting to a few things their stuff won't remove and then giving you a long list of things that it will remove. This is a very old ploy. How do we know that it will remove the ones the woman says it will? And a margarine ad tries to talk past you with its discussion on serum cholesterol and polyunsaturated fats. Will their margarine really reduce serum cholesterol? What if it does? Can you eliminate serum cholesterol? Can you avoid it by eating polyunsaturated fats? Just what are they anyway? The ad writer knows full well that most people have not the foggiest notion what polyunsaturated fats are. He hopes you'll be cowed by his superior knowledge, feel ignorant and accept his supposedly expert opinion, and be impressed by his big words.

You can get into a good discussion of the way the female body is used in ads as a releaser, along with

the significance of releasers and other body language and verbal and nonverbal clues. One can go from perfume or shaving lotion commercials to a discussion of the makeup of perfumes, their origins, their past and present uses in attraction as well as in masking odors of filthy bodies, then into a discussion of natural human odors, sexual attractants, and pheromones. Most people seem totally unaware that cosmetics can be dangerous, and it would be the Devil's own job to find out the contents of a cosmetic, unless the manufacturer tells you. As this is being written there have been some news accounts indicating that this may be changing. Let's hope so. The advertised (at least, by implication) effectiveness of mouth washes in killing common cold viruses is easy enough to scuttle. This can lead into a discussion of how disinfectants do and do not work, what viruses are, contagion, and so on. And toothpaste ads with their "brighteners," "whiteners," and other claims make fertile fields for commentary. Just what is this "sex appeal" they so stridently proclaim their favored soap will give you anyway? Nonsense about "iron poor blood" can lead into a discussion of hemoglobin and anemias. Cigarette ads no longer appear, but I have several choice ones from the past. The ads for small cigars can serve just as well. Glass tubing guts are almost too ridiculous to bother with, as are sink drain sinuses and indicator dyes showing a color change.

Well, there are a great many of these. Anyone can easily find his own. There is nothing very difficult or profound about doing this. The students can get a kick out of it as well as learn. Education need not always be a crashing bore.

Clifford J. Dennis
Department of Biology
University of Wisconsin—
Whitewater 53190

RESOURCES FOR POPULATION EDUCATION

1974 was World Population Year, and changes in numbers and locations of people emerged as an issue of global and national concern. Although the population growth rate in the U.S. has declined significantly in the last year, this does not decrease the importance of population education in schools. The report of the President's Commission on Population Growth and the American Future (1972) defines population education as "the process by which the student investigates and explores the nature and meaning of population processes, population characteristics, the causes of population change, and the consequences of these processes, characteristics, and changes for himself, his family, his society, and for the world."

Although we in the U.S. make up 6% of the world's population, we consume almost 40% of the global resources. Thus, the implications of individual population-related behavior should be a major area of concern. In the context of developing responsible behavior in the area of reproduction, resource use, and mi-

gration, the sciences—especially biology—play a vital role.

Population Education Programs. The Population Council (245 Park Ave., New York 10017) is one of the pioneer organizations in the field of population education. Its members have been concerned with the content of population education and how it enters the educational process. The first national conference on population education was held in 1971 by the Population Reference Bureau (1755 Massachusetts Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036). The proceedings of this conference have been published (1971b), and the Bureau also publishes a newsletter, *Interchange*, which serves as a resource guide for teachers. World Education (1414 Sixth Ave., New York 10019) is primarily interested in international population education and provides a valuable resource, *World Education Reports*. The Zero Population Growth's *National Reporter* carries a section on population education and a teacher's resource package is available from the national office (1346 Connecticut Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036).

Several universities in the U.S. have developed teacher training programs in population education. One of the earliest is the program at Columbia Teachers College, directed by Sloan Wayland (1968, 1972a, 1972b). The program at Indiana University, directed by Jerry Brown (1972), is geared to teacher training, research, and curriculum development in the social sciences. The Harvard University Center for Education and Development has a population education unit directed by David Kline (1972), which is concerned with international population education. The development of population education as a part of environmental education is the focus of the program at the University of Delaware directed by Robert Stegner (1971). Byron Massialas (1972) of Florida State University has developed a program for population education in the social sciences using the inquiry method.

Content of Population Education. Burlson (1971) has suggested that population education should involve four major concepts: population dynamics, family living, reproductive education, and underlying values. The University of Delaware's Population Environmental Education Project (1972) integrates population concerns into environmental education. The major conceptual scheme of this approach is that "Man is a part of a natural system, the earth, and is ultimately subject to the limits of the system."

Perhaps the most comprehensive sourcebook on population was developed by Horsley et al. (1972). It is directed to students in grades 7-12 and is multidisciplinary.

In the value clarification approach of Massialas (1972), alternate viewpoints are presented to the learner, who then makes informed choices about various population issues. Nelson (1972) is another valuable reference for the value clarification approach.

Following the report of the President's Commission, the Population Reference Bureau (1973) developed a film *Population and the American Future* for classroom use along with a study guide *Options*. A number