

Peter D.

Media Literacy

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Alcohol Prevention FAQ

What is media literacy?

Media images, especially ads, are more than just pretty pictures. They're usually designed with sales or power motives behind them. A literate person knows that words on a page follow rules of syntax to create meaning. Media literacy teaches the syntax and intending meanings of electronic media. It identifies who created the media, their motives, and the media's intended effects.

Does alcohol advertising really have much effect on children?

Hundreds of scientific studies demonstrate that alcohol advertising has a significant effect on underage drinking. Children who like alcohol advertising drink more. Also, the more alcohol advertising there is in a market, the more teens living there will drink. Of course, alcohol companies know this, which is why such a large percentage of their advertising is so appealing to kids and why ads are strategically placed so that proportionally, kids see more alcohol ads than adults.

Why is media literacy important to preventing underage drinking?

Children with media literacy skills are more resistant to the social pressures to drink. In a study by Epstein & Botvin (*Journal of Addictive Behavior* 2007), teens with media resistance skills are reported to consume less alcohol than their peers without these skills.

What proof is there that your media literacy program is effective?

Middle school test results show that alcohol consuming 8th graders who participated in Dr. DeBenedittis' *Alcohol Literacy Challenge* reduced their drinking from an average of 4.39 drinks during the prior month to 0.17 drinks during the month after. At the same time, the control group went from an average of 4.66 drinks to 7.00. Please see the attached sheets for results of this study and an explanation of the theories upon which this curriculum is based.

Can parents really control or reduce the alcohol advertising their kids are exposed to?

Sadly, no. In fact, our government gives tax breaks to alcohol companies for the ads they produce targeting children. This is why media literacy education is so critical. Parents concerned about their children drinking need to inoculate them against alcohol marketing. The *Alcohol Literacy Challenge* is the most effective way to do this. It teaches children to recognize the expectations they have around drinking, how these are created and how they can be changed.

We already have prevention programs in our schools, why do we need another one?

Because this one works—and it's less time consuming (only 90 minutes). Schools given the opportunity to use the *Alcohol Literacy Challenge* will quickly move it to the top of their prevention education program. Since alcohol companies spend \$5 Billion a year on marketing, there's no way schools can even come close to having enough prevention programs in place. An effective lesson that can be taught in 1 or 2 class periods will be a welcomed addition for concerned educators.

Prevention



Critical Thinking



Self Esteem



Edgewood Middle School

Participants

A total of 98 students completed the baseline surveys on March 10th, 2008 and 70 students completed the post-test surveys on April 28th, 2008 (71% retention rate). The respondents were approximately evenly divided between males and females (46 and 51, respectively) and all were students in the 8th grade. At baseline a total of 79 students were the experimental group and 19 were in the control group. At post-test, 53 of the experimental group and 17 of the control group participants remained in the study. Approximately 58% of the students reported their ethnicity as Caucasian and 33% Hispanic.

Alcohol Consumption

On a self-report calendar where students report on their drinking occasions for the previous four weeks, the majority of the students (n=67 [83.8%] at baseline and n=61 [88.4%] at post-test) reported that they had abstained from alcohol in the previous four weeks. Thus, consumption data is limited to information obtained from the 9 students that reported drinking during the baseline period. Accordingly, no statistical test is appropriate to determine significance of change. However, the means are included in the table below for informational purposes:

		Means from 9 drinking students		Means from all students	
		Baseline	Post-test	Baseline	Post-test
Total Drinks	Test Group	4.39	0.17	0.64	0.07
	Control Group	4.66	7.00	0.82	1.24
Drinking Sessions	Test Group	3.10	0.10	0.39	0.10
	Control Group	2.00	2.33	0.32	0.37
Peak Drinks	Test Group	2.89	0.17	0.42	0.07
	Control Group	2.50	3.67	0.44	0.65

Students were also surveyed regarding their expectancies of alcohol. Expectancies are beliefs held about the effects of alcohol, such as “alcohol makes me outgoing”, “alcohol makes one aggressive”, or “alcohol makes parties more fun”. Results indicated that students did not significantly change their expectancies of alcohol from baseline to post-test. Given the low number of students (fortunately) that reported consuming alcohol, it is possible that the majority of these 8th graders already have expectancies that discourage them from drinking. This hypothesis could not be tested, however, given the low number of drinking students.

Five of the students reported at least one instance of binge drinking during the baseline period. Binge drinking is defined as five or more drinks on one occasion for males and four or more drinks on one occasion for females. Only two students reported at least one instance of binge drinking during the post-test period.

Alcohol-Related Harms

Respondents reported an average of 2.48 alcohol-related harms during the baseline period, with a range of 0 to 53, in the previous 30 days. This could mean that they experienced several instances of the same harm or several different harms. The harms were measured on a 29-item survey that asks for the number of times they experienced each alcohol related issue. Examples of harms items are: “I have had memory loss because of my drinking”, “I have taken foolish risks when I have been drinking”, “I have passed out from drinking”, and “The quality of my school work has suffered because of my drinking”. During the post-test period, students reported an average of 1.11 alcohol-related harms, with a range of 0 to 24.

The Theory Behind Changing Alcohol Expectancies for Prevention

The Alcohol Literacy Challenge is a 90-minute lesson that combines the latest alcohol expectancies research with the critical thinking approach of media literacy. It's author was invited to present it at workshops in the CAPT sponsored Grants to Reduce Alcohol Abuse conference held in Albuquerque, NM in January of this year. The lesson changes students' expectations around drinking, thereby reducing subsequent drinking.

Being able to change students' alcohol expectancies in a single media literacy lesson have been documented by Erika Austin¹ and replicated by the author in Santa Fe, NM.² Changing alcohol expectancies are a critical step towards reducing underage drinking, as alcohol expectancies have been found to:

- exist before a person begins drinking³
- predict how old a person is when he or she starts drinking⁴
- distinguish light-drinking and heavy-drinking children⁵
- mitigate the influence of other factors that influence alcohol use, such as one's family history or drinking or belief in the negative consequences of drinking⁶

The Alcohol Literacy Challenge is based on a University of Central Florida (UFC) program that has been shown to reduce drinking through the use of media literacy analysis of ads to challenge alcohol expectancies. Preliminary tests conducted in 2006 found that students who participated in the College Alcohol Literacy Challenge significantly reduced their drinking over the next 30 days. And compared to a control group, participants reported one episode less per month of binge drinking as well as consuming one less drink per week when they did drink. Though unpublished, these findings were noticed by the Department of Education, who funded UFC with \$275,000 for the 2007/8 and 2008/9 school years to further develop and expand the program to include all freshmen.

The middle and high school Alcohol Literacy Challenge curriculum are age appropriate versions of the college lesson. It has been written in close consultation with the UFC researchers who designed the college level program.

¹ Austin EW, Johnson KK. (1997). Effects of general and alcohol-specific media literacy training on children's decision making about alcohol. *J Health Communication* 2:17-42

² Peter DeBenedittis, et. al. (2000). Alcohol Prevention Children Love to Learn. Presented to the Alcohol Policy XII Conference: Alcohol & Crime Research for Practice and Prevention. Washington D.C.

³ Dunn, M.E. & Goldman, M.S. (1996). Empirical modeling of an alcohol expectancy network in elementary school children as a function of grade. *Experimental and Clinical Psychopharmacology*, 4, 209-217

⁴ Christiansen, B.A., Smith, G.T., Roehling, P.V., & Goldman, M.S. (1989). Using alcohol expectancies to predict adolescent drinking behavior at one year. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 57, 93-99

⁵ Dunn, M.E. & Goldman, M.S. (1998). Age and drinking-related differences in the memory organization of alcohol expectancies in 3rd-, 6th-, 9th-, and 12th grade children. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 66, 579-585

⁶ Goldman, M.S. & Darkes, J. (1997). Expectancy mediation of a biopsychosocial risk for alcohol use and alcoholism. In I. Kirsch (Ed.), *Expectancy, experience, and behavior* (pp. 233-262). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association