

Facsimile Transmission

College of Urban & Public Affairs
Portland State University
PO Box 751
Portland, OR 97207-0751

Tel: (503) 725-4043
Fax: (503) 725-5199
Web: <http://www.upa.pdx.edu>

Date: 4/20/10

To: Patrick Bresette

Fax #: 866 203 5931

From: Larry Wallack

of pages: 10 incl cover

Cover Message:

CONFIDENTIAL:

The pages of this transmission are to be viewed and handled by the recipient named only and/or to be routed only for its intended purpose. If there is any uncertainty regarding the intended recipient or usage, please call the phone number of the sender shown on this page.

NEWS FOR A CHANGE

An Advocate's Guide to Working With the Media

Lawrence Wallack • Katie Woodruff • Lori Dorfman • Iris Diaz



SAGE Publications
International Educational and Professional Publisher
Thousand Oaks London New Delhi

Example: “We hope that the lawsuit will make a difference; we hope it will result in [the Chicago Housing Authority] being held to the same standard that any other landlord in the city of Chicago is held to.”—William Wilen, Legal Assistance Foundation¹⁸

*Calculate social math*¹⁹

Every day, people are bombarded with news stories involving very large numbers. We hear about billions of dollars for various programs and projects, or we might learn that hundreds of thousands of people are at risk for a particular disease, or that a large percentage of the population feel a certain way about a particular issue. We know the numbers are large, but more often than not we are numbed rather than informed because we simply don't have a way of understanding the meaning of the number.

Advocates must become skilled in translating large numbers so they become interesting to the journalist and meaningful to the audience. **Social math** is the practice of making large numbers comprehensible and compelling by placing them in a social context that provides meaning. There are several ways to do this:

- **Break down numbers by time.** For example, a new study comes out showing that 3 million teenagers are diagnosed with a sexually transmitted disease every year.²⁰ You can say that amounts to more than 8,200 teenagers a day or more than 340 an hour. You could even estimate conservatively that every weekend, more than 16,000 teenagers will be infected with an STD.
- **Break down numbers by place.** For example, research shows that every year, roughly 1 million youth start smoking²¹; this is about 2,700 children every day. You can say that this is the equivalent of more than 33,000 classrooms of students every year or 90 classrooms a day (assuming a class size of 30). You could also point out that this would be equivalent to all the youth in a specific city or cities in your area.
- **Provide comparisons with familiar things.** For example, in 1993, health care reform was high on the public agenda, and the Canadian single payer system was a potential model. Some in the United States were arguing that the Canadian system was not a good one and that Canadians really preferred a U.S. private insurance model. However, a poll found that only 3% of Canadians believed a U.S.-type system would be preferable. To drive this point home, one advocate noted, “To put that in perspective, 16% of Canadians believe that Elvis Presley is still alive.”²²

In another example, advocates concerned about gun violence in California found that there were more than 11,000 gun dealers in the state in 1996. To put this in context, they created a chart showing the number of gun dealers in comparison to the state's McDonald's (850), high schools (2,170), and libraries (1,024). (See Figure 4.1.) This brought the issue of gun availability

State of California Gun Dealer Comparisons

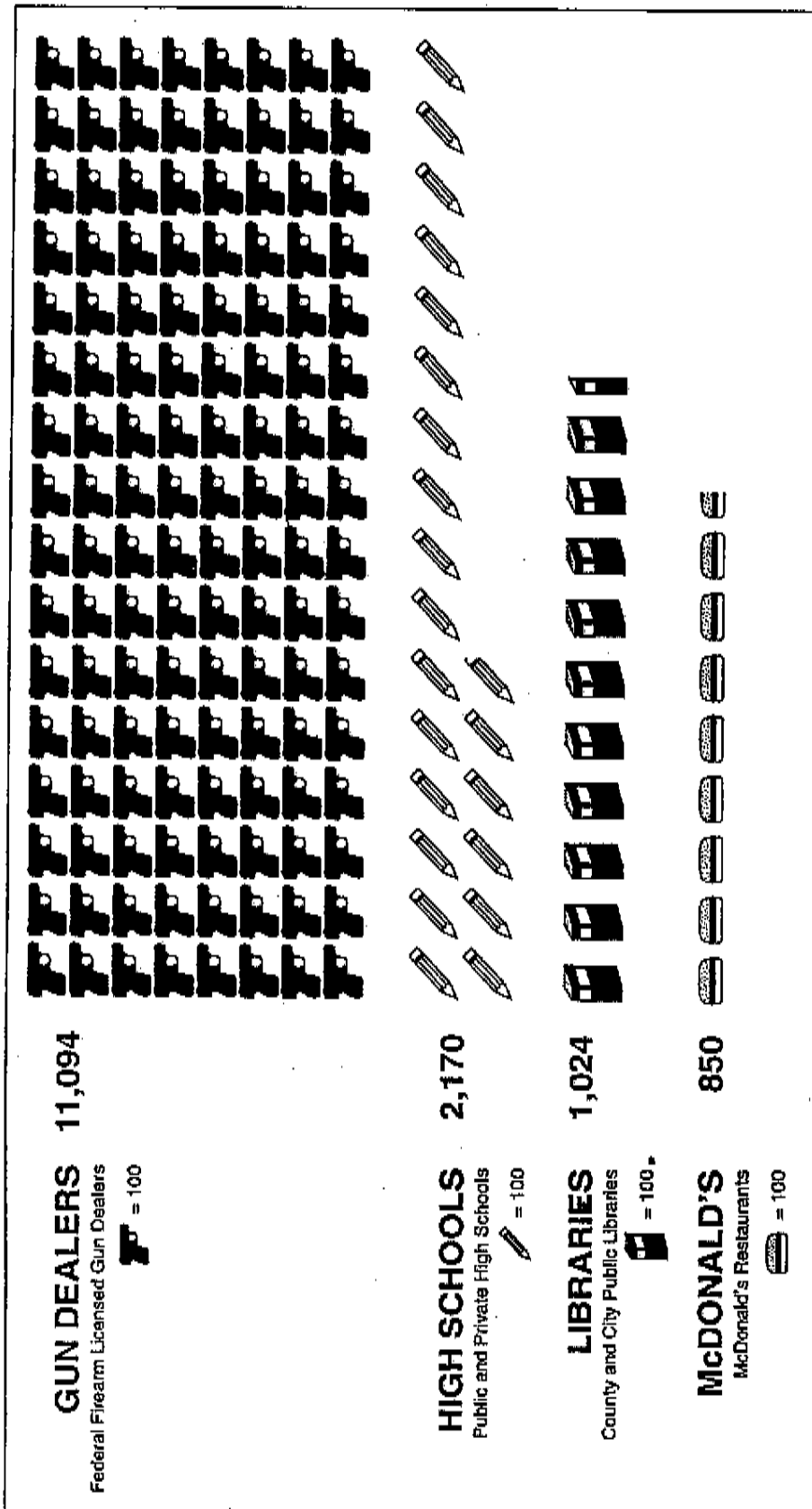


Figure 4.1. A Chart Created by Prevent Handgun Violence Against Kids
 SOURCE: Prevent Handgun Violence Against Kids is a public education campaign funded by a grant to Martin & Glantz LLC from The California Wellness Foundation. All statistics are for the State of California. Data on gun dealers: Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, Jan. 22, 1996; data on high schools: Department of Education, Educational Demographics Unit, 1994; data on libraries: California State Library, Library Services Bureau, 1994; data on McDonald's: McDonald's Corporate Headquarters, 1996.

to life: McDonald's restaurants seem to be everywhere, but there are more than 10 times as many firearms dealers. At the same time, the comparison brings into the frame images related to young people—schools and libraries—so the audience is reminded of the things society could be providing more of for children and youth.

- **Provide ironic comparisons.** For example, a child care advocacy group noted that child care workers make less than \$10 per hour whereas prison guards are paid more than \$18 per hour. The ironic comparison helped call into question society's priorities and perhaps suggested the notion that good early childhood care can prevent criminal behavior later.

Such comparisons can be made on both sides of an issue, of course. As a Cato Institute policy analysis on campaign spending noted, "To say that too much money is spent on campaigning is to beg the question, compared to what? . . . Americans spend more than twice as much money each year on yogurt as on political campaigns."²³

- **Personalize the number.** For example, community residents near a gasoline refinery noted that the plant emits 6 tons of pollutants per day—or 25 balloons full of toxic pollution for each school child in the town.²⁴ The personalized statistic was much more vivid and immediate than the overall number of six tons per day.

ADVOCACY IN ACTION: Social Math on Child Care

Advocates for high-quality, affordable child care used social math to reframe their issue as one of economic health. The economy of Santa Cruz County depends on agriculture, and the advocates were able to use this to make their point about how child care contributes to the community. The Santa Cruz County Office of Education Child Development Resource Center, in a project with the National Economic Development and Law Center, determined that child care, as a business, contributes \$30 million a year to Santa Cruz County's economy—more than lettuce (\$27.1 million) or raspberries (\$27.1 million), and almost as much as roses and apples combined (\$32 million). They held a news conference to present this information (see Figure 4.2), highlight concerns about the child care shortages in the county, and call on local industry to invest in child care.

Comparing the value of child care to lettuce and raspberries effectively made the case for child care as a social good, and the comparison was featured prominently in the news coverage. No one in Santa Cruz County has to be told about the value of those crops to the local economy, but few had probably ever considered the child care industry in the same light or suspected that it contributed as much as the cash crops. The group's use of social math effectively positioned child care as an important issue for everyone who lives in the county, whether or not they have children.

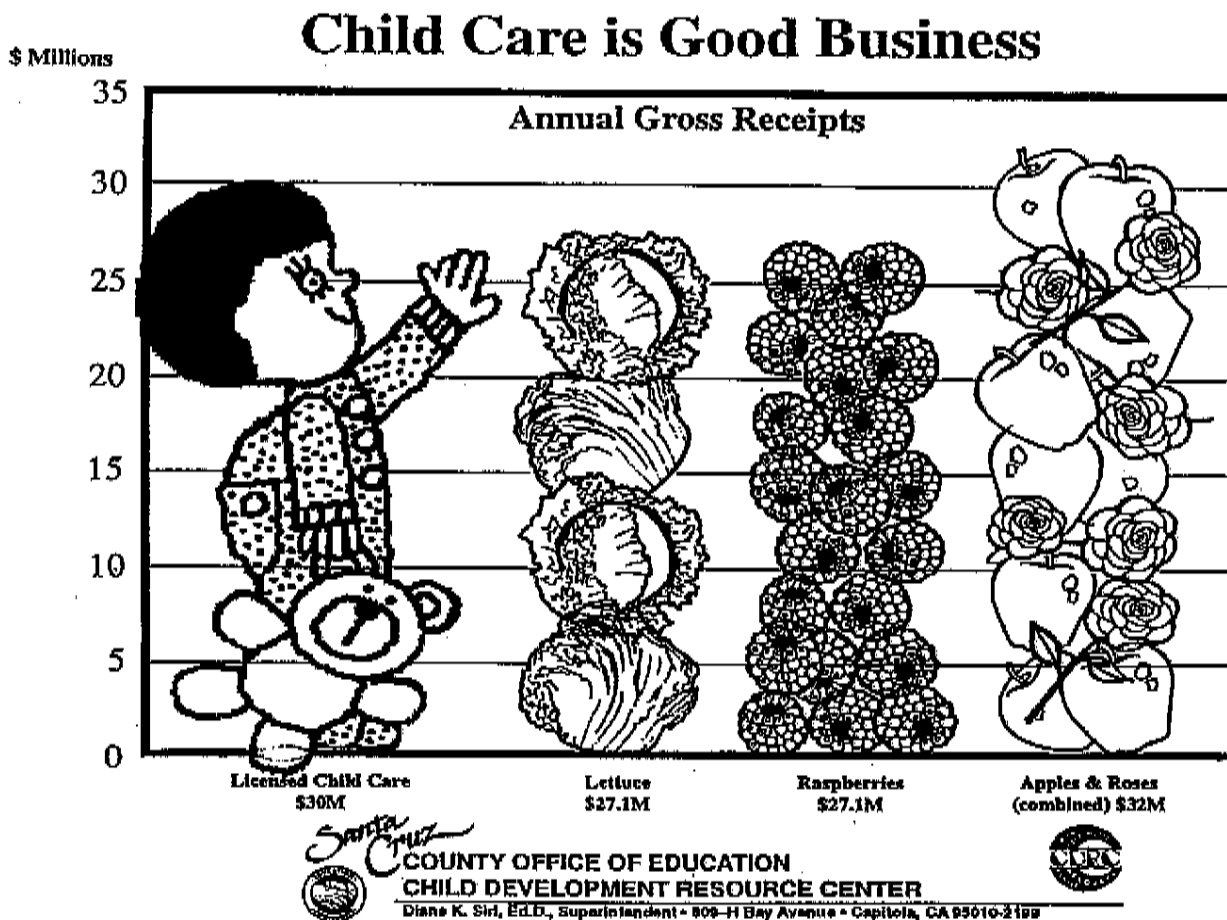


Figure 4.2. Child Care Advocates Use Social Math

SOURCE: Chart designed by the Santa Cruz County Office of Education, Marcia Meyer and Suzan Mark, 1997.

Identify authentic voices

One of the most effective things you can do to help frame stories from a policy perspective is to put journalists in touch with people who have had direct experience with the problem you are trying to solve. Reporters need to have a personal story to illustrate the topics they cover; it is a critical requirement of the news format. The challenge for advocates is to help personalize the story enough to make it compelling for the audience, but not so much that they will blame the victim.

Fortunately, many advocates are people who have directly experienced the problem and become active in efforts to address it. These “victims” have unique power to shape news coverage through their authentic stories. In fact, they have transformed themselves from victims to advocates.

If you know of such people who would like to talk with journalists, it is important to work with them in advance so they feel prepared and comfort-

Checklist: Framing

1. Translate individual problem to a social issue.
2. Assign primary responsibility.
3. Present a solution.
4. Make a practical appeal.
5. Develop story elements:
 - compelling visuals and symbols
 - media bites
 - social math
 - authentic voices

able. Also, they should be able to talk about the policy solution, just as any other advocate would. Advocates should be prepared to shift from their personal experience to the policy issue. For example, journalists will ask someone who has suffered a loss, "How do you feel about what happened?" This question should be the starting point for a statement that illuminates who shares responsibility for prevention, such as, "I feel angry that the city council has not done more to respect my right, and my family's right, to breathe clean air. They must pass the clean air ordinance now."

ADVOCACY IN ACTION: My husband almost died

The most powerful advocates are often those who have had direct experience with the problem. In Livermore, California, a law enforcement officer was shot with a small handgun by a driver he had pulled over on a routine traffic stop. His wife became a strong advocate for banning these junk handguns in her town. When she told us her story for the first time, she cried as she described how her husband had nearly been killed; she then apologized for the emotion. We assured her, however, that not only were her feelings natural, they were a powerful part of her role in the advocacy effort she had joined. She replied, "It's good to know some good can come out of the pain."

Advocates should never hesitate to acknowledge their emotions in retelling their stories, *if they feel comfortable doing so*. It makes the story stronger for reporters and the message louder for policymakers. But they should also try not to be derailed by emotion; they must keep their focus on the policy approach they are advocating.

Our fifth rule is: Supply journalists with creative story elements that illustrate the solution you support. Because the way issues are framed helps news consumers decide who is responsible for the cause and solution of a problem, it is critical to pay attention to framing.

Summary

To frame your issue effectively, remember to:

- Know what you want to say before trying to attract media attention or talking to a journalist
- Anticipate different ways to shift from the inevitable questions that imply the problem is solely one of personal responsibility to answers that highlight the shared institutional accountability
- Prepare several illustrations to support your points, using compelling visuals, well-conceived media bites, social math, and other good story elements.

News coverage conveys credibility and legitimacy on an issue. By planning in advance to frame your issue from a progressive perspective, you can increase the likelihood not only that you will get the coverage, but that your issue will be covered in ways that increase support for the policies you promote.

Notes

1. Kosicki, G. (1993). Problems and opportunities in agenda-setting research. *Journal of Communication*, 43(2), 100-127.
2. There are many other, more complex meanings of the term *framing* used in the fields of linguistics and sociology; for our purposes in strategic media work, we use this practical definition.
3. Ryan, C. (1991). *Prime time activism*. Boston: South End Press.
4. Iyengar, S. (1991). *Is anyone responsible? How television frames political issues*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
5. Iyengar, 1991. An additional problem revealed in Iyengar's research is that when the person featured in the story is African American, viewers respond by blaming the victim even in stories that focus on the context rather than the individual. His analysis suggests that racial stereotypes run so deep that they are not overcome by contextual news frames.
6. Suro, R. (1993, January 11). Pollution-weary minorities try civil rights tack. *The New York Times*, p. A1.
7. Dorfman, L. (1994). *News operations: How television reports on health*. Doctoral dissertation, University of California at Berkeley.
8. *Beyond Affliction: The Disability History Project*, Straight Ahead Pictures, Inc., 1997. Tapes and transcripts of this 4-hour radio series broadcast on National Public Radio can be ordered by calling (303) 823-8000. Also see <http://www.npr/org/programs/disability>.
9. Hardin, P. (1996, March 28). Congress holds "smoking gun": Cigarette machines not out by deadline." *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, p. A1.
10. Shaw, R. (1996). *The activist's handbook: A primer for the 1990s and beyond*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Thinking Like an Advocate

69

11. Television interview, Sacramento, June 10, 1998.
12. Hilts, P. (1995, March 9). Head of FDA calls smoking pediatric disease. *The New York Times*, p. A11.
13. Hayden, T. (1997, February 10). Be equally tough on causes of violence. *Los Angeles Times*, p. B5.
14. Sample, H. (1997, January 10). Boxer proposes ban on sale of "junk guns." *Sacramento Bee*, p. A3.
15. Quoted in the Advocacy Institute's *Trumpet Notes*, 1(3), page 5, February 1996.
16. Testimony at Sacramento City Council meeting, May 14, 1996.
17. Rauch, Kate Darby. (1997, May 29). UC students' design may curtail GG suicide jumps. *West County Times*, p. A4.
18. Local Chicago TV news coverage, May 31, 1991.
19. For an in-depth primer on social math, see *By the numbers: A guide to the tactical use of statistics for positive policy change*. *Blowing Smoke Advisory No. 2*. Washington, DC: The Advocacy Institute.
20. Eng, T., & Butler, W. (Eds.). (1997). *The hidden epidemic: Confronting sexually transmitted diseases*. Washington, DC: Committee on Prevention and Control of Sexually Transmitted Diseases, Institute of Medicine, National Academy of Sciences.
21. Incidence of initiation of cigarette smoking—United States, 1965-1996. (1998, October 9). *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR)*, 47(39).
22. Toner, R. (1993, May 4). In health-care debate, Canada plan still lives. *New York Times*, p. A22.
23. Smith, B. (1995, September 13). *Campaign finance regulation: Faulty assumptions and undemocratic consequences*, Cato Institute document cited in Engle, M. (1996, March/April). Yogurt, antacid, and politics: The selling of the underselling of America. *Extra!*, p. 10.
24. Cummings, P., Jacobs, J., & Stevenson, M. A. (1994). *Chevron reformulated fuels project media plan*. Unpublished manuscript, prepared for the Richmond Neighborhood Health Center, Richmond, CA.

Calculating social math

Social math is the process of translating large numbers to be interesting to journalists and meaningful to audiences.

Using familiar things, break down numbers by

- Time (# per year, month, week, day, hour)
- Place (enough people to fill a classroom, stadium, specific city)
- Dollars (spent on ice cream, shoes, coffee)
- Ironic comparisons (highlights value by comparing to less important things)