Children’s Television Viewing: The Parental Role in Media Literacy

A Master’s Project

Presented to the Faculty in Communication and Leadership Studies

School of Professional Studies

Gonzaga University

Under the Supervision of Dr. Alexa Dare

Under the Mentorship of Dr. Kristine Morehouse

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Communication and Leadership Studies

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Abstract

Since the creation of television noticeable effects have been seen in children including imitating violent acts they have seen on television. While it may not be known how deep these effects may be or how changes in television viewing can affect children. This study through the use of cultivation theory, as well as the social learning theory seeks to better understand how parent’s perceptions towards television content can directly affect co-viewing with their children as well as how parenting may be directly affected by something seen or heard on television. Research was conducted through the use of a questionnaire, and concluded that parents perception of television directly affects the amount of co-viewing that is done with their children. Future research in this area is recommended. Including but not limited to a long term study to follow parent’s and their interactions with their children through multiple years.
Ch. 1 Introduction

1.1 Importance of the Study

Like many forms of technology, television’s evolution created uncertainty and problems. The average child spends more than five hours per day with television, and other media linked to the television (Rossiter, 1979). Television consumption climbed steadily from 1.8 hours per day in the late 70’s (Dorey, Roberts, Maddison, Meagher-Lundberg, Dixon & Ni-Mhurchu, 2009). A separate study found that by 2004, children as young as one-year-old watched 2.2 hours of television per day, with an increase to 3.6 hours per day by the time the child reaches three-years-old (Christakis, Zimmerman, & DiGiuseppe, 2004). Several contributing factors can be attributed to this increase, including an increase of total televisions in the household with televisions placed in the child’s bedroom. An increase in parental television viewing, and a rise in single family households as well other socio economic factors (Christakis, Zimmerman, & DiGiuseppe, 2004) contributed to an increase in total viewing hours.

With the increased popularity of video games, YouTube, and social networking sites such as Facebook, along with their rapid increase in linking with television, exposure will continue to increase (Cheng, Brenner, Wright, Sachs, Moyer & MEngg, 2004). Due to the large role that television plays in a child’s life special consideration needs to be given to the influences from television, and what a parent’s role in television viewing with children is.

1.2 Definition of Key Terms

Co-Viewing – The process of viewing television with the child.

Acculturation- The need to learn, and to understand the norms and values in their society.
1.3 Organization of Remaining Chapters

The remainder of this study will be broken into four separate chapters. Chapter two will contain the review of literature. This review will focus on three main theories of communication including cultivation theory, social learning theory, and the theory of social interactionism. Chapter two concludes by providing a planned research study pertaining to the importance of parental impact on children’s television viewing. Chapter three provides the scope and methodology of this study. Chapter four provides the details and results of the study, and Chapter five contains the limitations of the study, a summary of the study, as well as the opportunity for further study.
Ch. 2 Review of Literature

Like many forms of technology, television is evolving, and with evolution comes unforeseen problems. By the time children graduate high school they have spent 18,000 hours in front of the television, and only 13,000 hours in a classroom (Milton, 1996). A study completed by the Kaiser Family foundation revealed that 26% of American children aged two to four years old have a television in their bedroom. By the time they get to middle school that number has increased to 70% (Roberts, &, Foehr, 2004). Children with televisions in their bedrooms watch significantly more television than those without private access to television. Parents of children with unlimited access to television reported fewer rules, less co-viewing, and less restrictive mediation (Vittrup, 2009).

2.1 Philosophical Assumptions

Many studies have shown a correlation between television viewing and negative behaviors, including obesity, anxiety, depression, violence, and attention disorders such as ADHD (Cheng, et al., 2004). Two possible way to combat the effects of television on children is through the process of co-viewing, and mediation.

The word “mediate” derives from the Latin word medium, meaning an intervening substance or something that is in the middle (Einspahr, 2010).

According to Rousseau, modes of mediation arise out of humanity’s innate perfectibility; the capacity to develop that distinguishes humans from animals in his state of nature stories, and represents various ways in which complex...
relationships of domination, submission, influence, and freedom are created within selves and between selves, and others.

The best way to approach the study of mediation, and television is to delve into the socio-cultural framework. “Socio-cultural is based on the premise that as people talk, they produce and reproduce culture (Griffin, 2009).” It can be argued that all communication is mediated, and mediation makes dialogue possible (Lundby, 2005). This dialogue between self and others helps builds morality and sense of self (Einspahr, 2010) which helps with children’s observation and modeling in settings between children and parent.

**Theoretical Basis**

**2.2 Social Learning**

Albert Bandura believed that we learn by observing others. Bandura used the word modeling for the process of response acquisition (Griffin, 2012.). Bandura called this theory the Social Learning Theory. He believed children and adults acquire attitudes, and emotional responses through televised modeling (Griffin, 2012). With the increase in children’s television exposure, attitudes such as talking back to parents that are learned from watching compared to real life may steadily increase. Children model parent’s involvement with the television, and mimic their behaviors, including types of programs viewed and hours spent. Lack of parental involvement in television viewing may continue to increase these effects.

Bandura believes that television programmers are so successful at grabbing and holding attention due to five factors. (Griffin, 2012)
1. Keep it Simple: everyone understands fighting, even those of a much younger viewing age.

2. Distinctive: “pro-social behavior like sharing, sympathy, control of anger, and delayed gratification appears dull when compared to violent action sequences.”

3. Prevalent: Over 80% of primetime shows portray violent acts, with that number increasing to 90% for weekend cartoons. Bandura calls this “violence on demand”.

4. Useful: Violence is presented as a strategy for life, and suggest that violence is a preferred solution to human problems.

5. Positive: television draws in viewers by placing attractive bodies in front of the camera. When the star of the show fights, such aggression is given in a positive light showing the good guy wins.

Like foreign immigrants, toddlers use television to learn cultural norms. According to Young Yun Kim (1977), as foreign immigrants move from one culture to another, behavioral modes and values in the old setting may prove maladaptive in the new. This creates high levels of uncertainty among foreigners; they must learn to understand the norms and values in their new society, called acculturation (Woo & Dominick, 2003). While this process is most familiar with foreign immigrants, the same process is brought forth in toddlers being assimilated into society. “Through prolonged and varied experiences in communication, children gradually learn and internalize the symbols and practices of the communication system (Woo & Dominick, 2003”). With a high exposure to television, an immigrant or child may become accustomed to the language, actions, and symbols that the television provides both in television content, as well as the symbolization of the advertisements. George Gerbner believed that broadcasting is the most
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concentrated, homogenized, and globalized medium (Gerbner, 1998). In the United States the top 100 advertisers pay for two thirds of all network television, and six global businesses own all major network television stations, as well as a major portion of all other stations (Ownership Chart, 2011). When advertising and television content are combined, the cultural effects create, or reflect images that may or may not reflect parental beliefs.

**Parental Imitation**

Bandura’s theory has also been used to explain parental imitative behavior in parenting practices when pertaining to children (Wharton & Mandell, 1985). Although imitative behavior by children following television programming is well documented, imitative behaviors by parents with children as victims has seldom been reported (Wharton & Mandell, 1985). This lack of reporting could be tied to the absence of supervision between children and adults whom are no longer supervised (Wharton & Mandell, 1985). One main tenet of the social learning theory is the applicability to understanding imitative behavior. Bandura believed four conditions to be necessary for observational learning (Wharton & Mandell, 1985).

1. Observation of a particular behavior that serves as the stimulus.
2. Symbolic rehearsal of observed event.
3. Storage of information for future use.
4. Acceptance of the message invoked.

An imitative action then requires for the opportunity to arise. Social isolation is believed to be a main factor in this imitative behavior. Those who feel isolated from society tend to view higher levels of television (Wharton & Mandell, 1985).
2.3 Gerbner’s Cultivation

Violence is perhaps one of the highest studied areas of television effects, with over 1000 studies linking media violence to real-life violence (Cheng, et al., 2004). Cultivation theory is defined as the massive exposure to television’s reconstructed realities which can result in perceptions of reality very substantially different from what they might be if viewers watched less television (Cohen & Weimann, 2000). In many ways the highly stylized, stereotyped, and repetitive images portrayed on television have been regarded as an important source of socialization and everyday information (Cohen & Weimann, 2000). According to many studies using laboratory simulations, population-based observations, and longitudinal analysis, children who are exposed to violent television programming are more likely to be aggressive and to become involved in the juvenile justice system compared with those with less exposure (Cheng, et al., 2004).

Perhaps one of the most popular studies on television and violence is George Gerbner’s Cultural Indicators Project. Considered to be one of the main conclusions of Gerbner’s cultivation theory, mean world syndrome, is the “violence related content of mass media that convinces viewers that the world is more dangerous than it actually is, and prompts a desire for more protection than is warranted by any actual threat” ("mean world syndrome," 2008) Gerbner believed that even though only one percent of the population is a victim of violent crimes, heavy viewing of television can lead viewers to believe that the world is violent and no one can be trusted (LittleJohn & Foss, 2008). In an average household the television is in use for over seven hours a day (Gerbner, 1998), and Gerbner (1977) believes that there is a relationship between television viewing and television creates biased constructions of reality.
Even though Gerbner’s study was based on adult television viewers, there is a trending towards the mean world syndrome and its effects on children. Nancy Signorielli spent almost two decades studying the violent acts in children’s programming. After analyzing 2000 programs with more than 6,000 main characters Signorielli found that 71% of primetime, and 94% of weekend programs targeted at children contained violent acts (LittleJohn & Foss, 2008). The statistics, amount to over five acts of violence per hour during primetime, and approximately twenty per hour on the weekend (LittleJohn & Foss, 2008). Signorielli found that children learn to reproduce acts of violence and aggression after watching animated violence (Signorielli, 2003). Though comic violence appears less threatening, it is often mean spirited, and rarely shows a consequence for their actions (Signorielli, 2003). This lack of consequence causes children to fail to recognize the harm they may cause by imitating the same behaviors.

From 1993 – 2000 Signorielli revisited her mean world syndrome study. While the average number of violent acts had no change, the severity of acts became more violent (Signorielli, 2003). This revision of study shows the increased need for awareness of media literacy and the effects of television. One solution to help decrease the harmful effects of television is through the use of parental interaction with children about what they are seeing on television, also known as mediation, or co-viewing.

2.4 Social Interactionism

There has been conflicting views on children’s interaction while in a setting that included both parents, and the television. Charles Frazer believed that:

Television viewing, like other social activities, can be manipulated
by the actors in the situation, and takes on the character which they
give it. The children play numerous roles in the television environment
and are manipulated by the television input like any other social object might be
manipulated. The children displayed surprising sophistication at managing the
role of television in the viewing environment, using it to control and enhance
social interaction (Reid & Frazer, 1978).

Grounded in the sociological perspective, social interactionism models itself after the theory of
symbolic interactionism (Reid, & Frazer, 1978). Through the use of television, namely
advertising children use commercials to initiate conversation, and negotiate requests for certain
products (Reid, & Frazer, 1978).

In the late 1970’s it was estimated that the average child in America was exposed to over
20,000 commercials on a yearly basis. By the end of the 1990’s that amount was said to have
doubled to over 40,000 (Rossiter, 1979). Following those numbers an average child will have
watched over 400,000 advertisements by the time they reach the age of twelve. Studies have
shown that children use three specific forms of social interaction to interpret viewing situations
(Reid & Frazier, 1978).

1. Commercials were used to draw others into conversation and activities related or
unrelated to message content
2. Attempts were made to gain information from parents in order to resolve ambiguous or
complex messages
3. Commercials were used to avoid demands and requests of others.

In one study conducted by Zimmerman and Bell (2010) Advertising marketers target young
children as young as two, they found 90% of all children in the study began watching television
before the age of two. By the first grade, the child can recognize more than 200 brand logo’s including McDonald’s Arch, Burger Kings King, and the Chuck E. Cheese Mouse (Zimmerman & Bell, 2010).

Other studies have found that children who watch more commercials have a tendency to request a greater number of items from Santa Claus, and include brand names upon that list (Pine, & Nash, 2002). This same study by Pine, compared the original study group with a group from Sweden where they allow no advertising towards children, and found that the Swedish children asked for less items on their Christmas letter to Santa Claus, and fewer items included brand names (Pine, & Nash, 2002). This study shows a direct correlation between television advertising and their influence over children.

Children have been considered discontinuous viewers who frequently engage in other activities while watching television. Parents are given the opportunity to interpret what is presented to their children in commercials, especially when asked specific questions (Reid & Frazier, 1978). However, whether they take advantage of this opportunity depends on some extent on their particular consumer teachings (Reid & Frazier, 1978). This discontinuous viewing can cause a higher tendency in children to draw even more attention towards advertisement due to the advertisements catchy jingles, and flashing images to draw consumer’s attention (Reid & Frazier, 1978). Some research revealed that parents are more likely to discuss television with their children when they are concerned that the media might affect their children’s thought process.

With a relatively large amount of parents expressing some concern over their children’s television use, an important questions to ask is to what extent the parent’s supervise, mediate, or
restrict this usage. “Mediation has been conceptualized as a three-dimensional construct encompassing the following types of behaviors” (Nathanson, 2001).

1. Active Mediation: talking with children about what they are viewing on television
2. Restrictive mediation: setting rules about children’s television viewing such as acceptable shows, and amount viewed.

Television and parents comprise two of children’s most significant sources of information (Weintraub Austin, Bolls, Fujiyoka & Englebertson, 1999). “When parent-child co-viewing occurs, this creates a set of circumstances, which have the potential for providing certain benefits for children, via the television” (Dorr, Kovaric & Doubleday, 1989). While there are three types of mediation, often you will find more than one type actively used at the same moment. Co-viewing with the child, opens up many unannounced opportunities to help with discussions and explanations (Dorr, et al., 1989), also known as active mediation. This also provides the opportunity to bring up moral, and behavioral discussions.

Research reveals that parents are more likely to discuss television with their children when they are concerned that the media might affect their children’s thought processes (Cheng, et al., 2004). Studies have shown that parent’s seem to worry less about actual screen time and more about the content of television programs such as violence, sexual content, and explicit language (Rideout, Vandewater, & Wartella, 2003; St Peters, Fitch, Huston, Wright, & Eakins, 1991; Woodard & Gridina, 2000). By applying social interactionism theory it is shown that the parent child interaction, directly affects the relationship held between parent and child as well as the child and television.
2.5 Research Questions

With the increase of television exposure, there is great need to study the consequences of exposure to and impact of television. (Cheng, et al., 2004). After reading many studies, it became very apparent that these issues are not going to be going away in the near future. According to findings such as those from Austin, Roberts, and Nass (1990), parents can reinforce and take over television content control over their children; though parents do little to control or influence the messages their children are receiving through the television (Austin, et al., 1990; Bower, 1973).

R1: How do parents’ perceptions of television’s positive or negative effects, affects the frequency of co-viewing?

R2: Does parental viewing of television cause parents to imitate on screen personalities when interacting with their children?
3.1 Scope

There is a definite need for further research on the impact of television on children’s behavior. With new shows being created constantly, the need for constant updating of research is abundantly clear. There is also a further need for education of parents on the affects that the television has on a child. Not every parent will abide by the recommended guidelines given about television programming; it would make a big enough impact to provide this information to a wider spectrum of people than just those in the field.

Over the last few years an increase in internet sites that are tailored to parents who are willing to read up on the effects of television sites such as turnoffyourtv.org, and limitty.org, among others have outdated statistics, as well as statistics that were achieved through non-scientific studies. This type of misinformation can cause parents to question the severity of the problem.

While there is an abundance of research of the effect of television on behavior, the impact and affect parental mediation on children’s behavioral effects currently lacks full exploration. Television and parents discretely and together, comprise two of children’s most significant sources of information (Weintraub-Austin, Bolls, Fujioka, & Engelbreton, 1999). Although it would be premature to blame poor parenting for unwelcome television effects on children, it is often difficult to compare the studies that have examined parent-child interaction and television due to inconsistent definitions and measurement techniques (Austin, Bolls, Fujioka, & Engelbreton, 1999). A better understanding of parent child interaction regarding the television is needed.
3.2 Methodology

Design and Sample

A survey is a quantitative research technique widely used in communication research (Rubin, Rubin, Haridakis & Piele, 2010). Well-designed surveys provide a non-biased way to gather the data in a comfortable setting for all involved (Rubin, Rubin, Haridakis & Piele, 2010). Survey takers have a higher level of comfort, and provide more accurate answers than those that have to voice their opinion in front of others (Rossiter, 1979).

This study consisted of a questionnaire containing 17 questions (Appendix A). This survey was maintained through surveymonkey.com, and was distributed through social networking sites such as cafemom.com, and Facebook, as well as several PTA organizations. Surveymonkey.com was chosen for ease of usage, along with the option of both online and paper questionnaires if needed. This survey was completed as a snowball convenience sampling using only volunteers. The use of a convenience sampling caused some limitations including the possible limitations in demographics. The target audience is any gendered parent with children between the ages of two through the age of fifteen. This age group chosen due to the influence parents still maintain over their children at this age.

All surveys will be recorded for use by researcher only, and was used as a whole. No identifying factors will be asked or given on the questionnaires in order to keep a level of anonymity and maintain an appropriate comfort level of questionnaire takers. Participants were notified of all confidentiality, and anonymity through a statement at the beginning of the survey.
3.3 Validity

Standard introductory questions will be used to help establish a foundation of validity for this study. “Criterion validity uses some standard or criterion to indicate a construct accurately” (Neumann, 2005, p. 193). It is a common known knowledge that most children watch on average two to three hours of television per day. Through the use of concurrent validity, measuring children’s watching and comparison to past studies, will help to accurately apply to validity of this study (Neumann, 2005, p. 193). In order to accurately maintain an online database of surveys, Surveymonkey.com was set to only allow one survey per IP address. This assured that one person was barred from taking the survey continuously. Also IP Addresses will be tracked at the conclusion of a two week period and any two similar addresses will be discarded.

3.4 Ethics

One major issue with questionnaires is fear about a lack of privacy which makes respondents evaluate to whom they choose to reveal personal data (Neumann, 2005). For this study the major ethical consideration would be asking parents about their personal habits as well as the habits of their children. In order to limit these privacy issues, no names, or any identifying factor was asked or answered in this questionnaire. A second issue for an ethical survey is voluntary participation (Neumann, 2005). For the purpose of this survey respondents were informed on the opening screen that all participation was voluntary, and they were allowed to quit at any time. This allowed parents to choose to participate, and to stop if they felt uncomfortable.
Ch. 4.1 The Study

This study was conducted over the course of a two week period and the results were collected through Surveymonkey.com, as well as printed surveys. Questionnaires were formatted using the seven answer Likert scale to provide an option of neutral or neither satisfied, or dissatisfied. The Likert scale is an important tool in research where it has been found that more option to better clarify the takers reasoning. Overall 271 surveys were collected for analysis. Of those 271 questionnaires, 28 were considered to be incomplete either by no answers filled out at all, or questions were skipped, this left a total of 243 questionnaires for use with this study. A total of 442 total children were involved in this study with a total average of 1.82 children per adult questionnaire taker. The following is a breakdown of age groups:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Breakdown of Childrens Age Groups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-10 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-14 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-17 years old</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In order to accurately measure a parents’ attitude towards television, four questions were asked for the parent to answer. Two of these questions pertained to their attitude towards children’s television with the final two being their attitude towards primetime programming, as well as their trust in advertisers. For further clarification, it was asked of questionnaire takers to explain their attitudes, and why they chose the option they did. Parents were also asked a series of questions in order to assess the number of those who actively co-viewed with their children.
The first question asked was regarding how satisfied the parents were with the educational content of children’s programming.

![Pie chart showing parental satisfaction with children's television educational level]

The educational level was included as a comparison to past studies which have shown some parents misconception about the educational level of television (Weintraub, et al., 1995). By asking about educational content, as well as parents conception of overall television content, it allows another layer to breakdown the possibility of how perception of educational content can affect a parents overall view of the television in general.

The second question pertained to children programming content overall.
Lastly parents were asked how satisfied they were with the level of primetime television for adults.
In order to accurately assess satisfaction levels, all questionnaire respondents were asked to provide reasoning about why they answered the way they did, as well as how they had come about to their perception of television content.

To cover all avenues of the television content, parents were also asked to rate if they believed advertising content to be honest.

To further understand questionnaire respondents assessment of this question takers were asked to expand on their choice with comments of why they either believe advertisers to be honest or not.

In order to accurately survey whether parents perception of television affects co-viewing, two questions were asked of parents in order to understand their co-viewing habits. First parents were asked how frequently they watched television with their children.
In order to provide a better understanding of parental reasoning, respondents were asked to clarify their reasoning. Next parents were asked about their interaction with their children during co-viewing.
This question was asked due to past studies which have shown a correlation between co-viewing, and the absence of parental interaction while co-viewing (Reid & Frazer, 1978).

In order to accurately measure parents imitating on screen personalities, I used two questions both asking the parent if they use television to help with their parenting, and also if they have witnessed other parents imitating on screen characters, or something they have seen on television. It became clear that most parents were aware of others imitating on screen characters, but felt that they were not as influenced as others.

![Pie chart showing how frequently parents seek parenting advice from the television, or other sources on the television. The chart shows that most parents rarely ask for advice, with a small percentage always asking.]
Discussion

4.2 R1: How do the perceived positive or negative effects of television, affect the frequency of co-viewing?

While analyzing the numbers it became very clear that those parents who had lower trust in television, had a higher tendency to co-view with their children more frequently. Those with higher trust had a lower tendency to co-viewing with their children. As many previous studies, 78% of all parents who responded to the questionnaire had witnessed their child at some point imitating an action previously seen on television.

For the age group ten and under, most parental comments stated that they were satisfied with the shows they allowed their children to watch. They were also highly dissatisfied with most television content as the following commenter states. “Almost all of children's programming, excluding PBS, even the "rated G" shows and movies all include adult innuendo
in them now. It is very frustrating as a parent of a 6 year-old who now asks ‘wait, what did they mean by that’ I wish that there was a better separation of shows appropriate for 10+ ages compared to what ‘G’ is supposed to be (G SHOULD be suitable for ALL ages).” Many parents also felt that those stations such as Disney and Nickelodeon who purportedly tailor programming to children are doing more harm than good. As one commenter pointed out, “A lot of the shows on channels like Disney and Nickelodeon have sitcoms that show adolescents and younger kids being disrespectful, conniving and dishonest to get away with things. It sends a message that it's ok for kids in the 'real' world to behave that way. I noticed a change in my younger son's attitude toward me and his dad after he watched the suite life shows.” Those with the same attitudes towards television as the two previous comments had a higher tendency to watch television with their children showing 57% of all parent’s questioned watched television with their children frequently.

For older teens the co-viewing numbers decreased. Though it was found in this research that parents whom did co-view had a higher tendency to speak with their children about what they were seeing on a regular basis. 67% of parent’s questioned spoke with their children about what they may have seen “I watched a movie about ‘bullying’ with my freshman daughter, we discussed why it was important to stand up to bullies and the proper way to handle the situation. About two months later, she was placed on a "kill list" at school and she handled the situation perfectly from the situations in the movie and our discussion.” Though this case was singled out within the context of this study, other parents felt that they had seen changes in their teens brought about from such shows as reality television, as well as shows like Desperate Housewives.
It is also important to note that those who have a television in their children’s bedroom showed a lower rate of co-viewing than those that do not allow television in the child’s room. This could be due to the child spending more time alone in their bedroom than in a common room with a parent. Those who commented that had a television in their bedroom felt they trusted their children to make the right decisions. Others used child blockers through their cable or satellite providers. As a couple commenters pointed out, “our son has a television in his bedroom that he uses mainly for video games. He has access to our cable but we have child block blocking channels and we change the password regularly when we see it accessed.”

Social interactionism theory teaches that a child benefits from the use of parental co-viewing, and the interaction between a child and their parent while being exposed to television. Of the 28% of respondents that allow their children to have televisions in their bedroom, 73% of those parents believe that television advertisers are being honest at least part of the time. While the other 27% believe that advertisers are being honest occasionally.

By examining this study through Gerbners concept of mean world syndrome and his research into the effects of television, there is an obvious correlation between television and parents perceptions of television. For instance, 58% of all respondents felt that Sesame Street was an educational program, and believed that there were many advantages to allowing their children to watch Sesame Street Programming. However, while there have been multiple studies stating that Sesame Street and other shows on the Public Broadcast Station are educational, there has been just as many that state otherwise. Through advertising claims about the educational level of children’s programming, many parents believe the message that television is an educational tool.
4.3 R2: Does parental viewing of television cause parents to imitate on screen personalities when interacting with their children?

According to the study’s findings, 63% of parents who completed the questionnaire felt that they never sought parenting advice from programming, or have used something they may have witnessed on television. Additionally, that number drastically decreased to only 29% of parents who had never witnessed someone they know imitating an on screen personality or something they had heard on television. While most felt that they have heard parents reciting lines, or saying “I heard on Dr. Phil”, others went as far to say that they have witnessed family members who are so addicted to a certain program that they almost become that character. “I have a niece who is addicted to Roseanne reruns. She has been home on maternity leave and she watches what seems like eight hours a day. She uses sayings that Roseanne says all the time, such as telling her older two children when they get annoying to go play in the streets.” While this was not the typical response, it does show that there is a general need for further in depth study in this area.

Bandura’s social learning theory points to a higher tendency of those who are socially isolated will become more susceptible to the effects of television. As the previous comment states, her niece has been home on maternity leave. Often times those on maternity leave have a change in routine which includes staying at home more often than normal. This comment also parallels Bandura’s theories four steps as stated above.

1. Observation of a particular behavior that serves as the stimulus. The television serves as the stimulus.
2. Symbolic rehearsal of observed event. Through watching re-run after re-run over time, Roseanne’s attitude becomes symbolic.

3. Storage of information for future use. Attitudes become stored for a later date of use.

4. Acceptance of the message invoked. Message is accepted and seen as acceptable, as the right time presents itself, parent’s states what previously was seen.

Through the conclusions of this study, it can be seen that there is a correlation between parental views on television and the amount of co-viewing done with children. This study has also shown the influence that television has on parental attitudes when interacting with their children on a regular basis. While most can be considered subtle there is a definite need for further research to monitor the increase of this situation.
Ch. 5 Conclusion

5.1 Limitations of Study

The limitations on this study would be the snowball sampling the sampling started on Facebook, and was asked that friends share with their friends. While this sampling provides for the most responses, it does lack in evenly sampling demographical areas. Through tracking IP addresses it was shown that the questionnaire was taken by people in 36 states, though no demographical information was collected to further breakdown the population.

5.2 Recommendations for Further Study

In order better study parental imitation of television characters it is recommended that further study be done in this area. It is recommended that a longer period of time for this study be used to focus in this area. Perhaps a study focused on test subjects in a controlled environment would provide more in depth data, as this questionnaire was limited in this area of study. It should also be noted that this study only focused on one area of mediation compared to the three areas contained in the literature review. It is recommended that all three studies be included for higher effective results on parental influence. In addition, as some theorists have stated that parent-child discussions are highly effective in influencing child’s development of communication, this could also provide a fertile field for information. This communication then effects a child’s ability to use information with fellow students, and in turn succeed in school, this also allows for the development of self-reliance (Burleson, Delia, Applegate, 1995).
5.3 Conclusion

Overall, it became very apparent that parents’ perceptions of the television affected how they dealt with their children and their exposure to the television. There is a definite need for further research on the impact of television on children’s behavior and media literacy. With the constant programming advancements, the need for constant updating of research is abundantly clear. There is also a further need for education of parents on the effects that the television has on a child. While not every parent will abide by the recommended guidelines given about television programming, this information could impact a wider spectrum of people than just those in the field of communication or media.

The American Academy of Pediatrics has urged many pediatricians to speak with parents and assess the amount to which parents talk with children about influences of television, as well as to impose viewing restrictions with the hopes that it will protect children from the undesirable effects of television (Nathanson, 2001). They also recommend a total of no more than one to two hours of total media time (Nathanson, 2001). As more and more technology is invented, and improved, it is now more important than ever to become involved in children’s exposure to television.
References


Appendix A

Survey Questions

Please complete this questionnaire as it is designed to better understand children’s television viewing practices, as well as parents’ involvement with the child. Your responses are voluntary and confidential, and your name will not be associated with the findings. You do not have to answer any question you do not wish to, and you are free to stop taking the survey at any time.

Please read each question and rate your level of agreement with each statement that most closely represents your opinion. You are also encouraged to use the comment line to expand and clarify your opinions when needed. This survey should take approximately 5 to 10 minutes to complete.

Thank you for your participation.

1. How many children under the age of 17 are currently living in your household?

2. As of today’s date how old are all children in your household?

3. At what age do you feel it is appropriate to allow your child (ren) to start watching television?
   a. 1
   b. 2
   c. 3
   d. 4
   e. 5
   f. 6
   g. 7+
4. On average how many hours per day does your child (ren) watch television?

   a. 1
   b. 2
   c. 3
   d. 4
   e. 5+

5. When does your child watch television most frequently?

   a. Weekday 6-11am
   b. Weekday 11am-4pm
   c. Weekday 4pm-10pm
   d. Weekend 6-11am
   e. Weekend 11am-4pm
   f. Weekend 4pm to 10pm

6. As a parent how satisfied are you with the educational level of television?

   a. Strongly Satisfied
   b. Satisfied
   c. Somewhat Satisfied
   d. Neutral
   e. Somewhat Dissatisfied
   f. Dissatisfied
   g. Strongly Dissatisfied

7. How frequently does your child (ren) watch these television shows?

   a. Loony Tunes: ex. Bugs Bunny, Wily E. Coyote, Roadrunner
   b. Hannah Montana
   c. Power Rangers
   d. Sesame Street
   e. The Simpsons
   f. SpongeBob Square pants
   g. Rug rats
   h. Phineas and Ferb
   i. Transformers
   j. Any Superhero Show: i.e. Superman, Batman, Spiderman etc.
      i. Always
ii. Usually
iii. Frequently
iv. Sometimes
v. Occasionally
vi. Rarely
vii. Never

8. How satisfied with the quality of content for children’s programming?
   a. Strongly Satisfied
   b. Satisfied
   c. Somewhat Satisfied
   d. Neutral
   e. Somewhat Dissatisfied
   f. Dissatisfied
   g. Strongly Dissatisfied

9. How frequently do you witness your child (ren) imitating a television character?
   a. Always
   b. Usually
   c. Frequently
   d. Sometimes
   e. Occasionally
   f. Rarely
   g. Never

10. Approximately how many hours per day do you view television?
    a. 1
    b. 2
    c. 3
    d. 4
    e. 5+

11. For the following television shows how likely are you to watch this genre of show?
    a. Daytime Soap Opera’s
    b. Daytime Talk Shows
    c. Late Night Talk Shows
    d. Evening News
e. Primetime Drama
f. Primetime Sitcom
g. Primetime Action
h. Reality Television
i. Sports
   i. Always
   ii. Usually
   iii. Frequently
   iv. Sometimes
   v. Occasionally
   vi. Rarely
   vii. Never

12. How frequently do you watch television with your child (ren)?
   a. Everytime
   b. Usually
   c. Frequently
   d. Sometimes
   e. Occasionally
   f. Rarely
   g. Never

13. While viewing television with your child (ren) how frequently do you speak with your child (ren) about something they have witnessed during a television show?
   a. Everytime
   b. Usually
   c. Frequently
   d. Sometimes
   e. Occasionally
   f. Rarely
   g. Never

14. Do you believe that television advertisers are honest in their advertisements?
   a. Always
   b. Usually
   c. Frequently
   d. Sometimes
   e. Occasionally
   f. Rarely
15. How frequently do you imitate a character you witnessed on television while interacting with your child (ren)?

a. Always
b. Usually
c. Frequently
d. Sometimes
e. Occasionally
f. Rarely
g. Never

i. Please Describe?

16. How frequently do you witness another parent imitating a television character or seeking advice on parenting through the television?

a. Always
b. Usually
c. Frequently
d. Sometimes
e. Occasionally
f. Rarely
g. Never

i. Please Describe?

17. How happy are you with the quality of content of adult programming on television?

a. Strongly Satisfied
b. Satisfied
c. Somewhat Satisfied
d. Neutral
e. Somewhat Dissatisfied
f. Dissatisfied
g. Strongly Dissatisfied
h. Strongly Dissatisfied