

CHILDREN AND TELEVISION: A PARENTAL
SURVEY OF ATTITUDES, MOTIVATION,
AND CONTROL OF CHILDREN'S
TELEVISION

BY

GARY J. HURST

||

Bachelor of Arts

Oklahoma Christian College

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma


1979

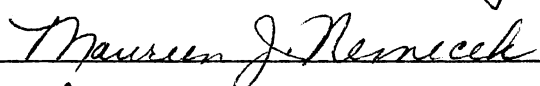
Submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate College of the
Oklahoma State University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for
the Degree of
MASTER OF SCIENCE
July, 1989


thesis
1989
#966c
cop. 2

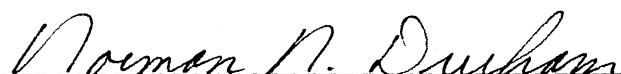
CHILDREN AND TELEVISION: A PARENTAL
SURVEY OF ATTITUDES, MOTIVATION,
AND CONTROL OF CHILDREN'S
TELEVISION

Thesis Approved:


Thesis Adviser






Dean of the Graduate College

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to express my sincere appreciation to Dr. Charles Fleming who continually gave me advice and suggestions. He also conveyed a positive attitude that the task set before me could be accomplished.

Special thanks are due to the principals who allowed me to use their students, parents, and teachers to gather my data. Without the support of Kim Lanier (principal at Oakdale Elementary) and Fred Rhodes (principal at Will Rogers Elementary), my job would have been very difficult.

I want to express gratitude to Dr. Bailey McBride who encouraged me to complete a masters degree. Without his unending support and confidence, this endeavor would not have been as educational and stimulating.

To my wife, Sylvia Hurst, I owe a debt that will be hard to pay back. She spent countless hours reading and editing my work to create a document worthy of scholarly achievement. She took care of my boys while their dad was working at the library and typing.

Mary Helon Fletcher also deserves credit for finding words which were not spelled correctly and sentences that did not make sense. I extend a sincere thank you to all of these people.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION	1
Background	3
Purpose and Value of the Study	5
Statement of the Problem	6
Endnotes	8
II. LITERATURE REVIEW	9
Children's Understanding Of Television Characters	10
Children and News	11
Children and Aggression	12
Children and Advertising	14
The Role of Parents	15
Why Parents Allow Children To Watch Television	17
Endnotes	18
III. METHODOLOGY	20
Sample Groups	21
Hypothesis	23
Survey Instrument	23
Data Collection Procedures	25
Analysis and Presentation	26
Endnotes	29
IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION	30
Response Rate	30
Demographics of Respondents	31
Why Do Parents Allow Their Children To Watch TV?	34
Endnotes	51
V. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS	52
Summary	52
Conclusions	55
Recommendations	57
Endnotes	62

Chapter	Page
BIBLIOGRAPHY	63
APPENDIX - COVER LETTER AND SURVEY	65

LIST OF TABLES

Table		Page
I.	Response Rate For Return Of Questionnaires . . .	31
II.	The Number Of Children In Respondent's Family	32
III.	Annual Household Income Of Survey Group . . .	34
IV.	Statement One Responses: My Child Learns About Other Parts Of The World By Watching Television	35
V.	Statement Two Responses: Watching Television Is Not A Good Family Activity . . .	36
VI.	Statement Three Responses: Viewing Television At Home Provides Me With The Opportunity To Select Programs Which I Feel Are Appropriate For My Child	36
VII.	Statement Four Responses: Television Keeps My Child Occupied So I'm Free To Do Other Tasks	37
VIII.	Statement Five Responses: Television Helps Keep My Child At Home So I Can Know Where He/She Is	38
IX.	Statement Six Responses: I Do Not Use Television As A Reward For Good Behavior For My Child	39
X.	Statement Seven Responses: Television Is Low Cost Entertainment For My Child . . .	40
XI.	Statement Eight Responses: I Like For My Child To Watch Television Because He/She Enjoys It	41

Table	Page
XII. Statement Nine Responses: Television Helps My Child To Learn	42
XIII. Statement Ten Responses: Television Teaches My Child To Work Out His/Her Own Problems	43
XIV. Statement Eleven Responses: A Child Who Does Not Watch Television Is A Misfit Among His/Her Peers	43
XV. Statement Twelve Responses: Television Is Not An Appropriate Pastime For Children	44
XVI. Statement Thirteen Responses: Television Watching Is A Difficult Habit For Children To Break	45
XVII. Statement Fourteen Responses: Television Programs Provide A Basis For Family Discussion	46
XVIII. Statement Fifteen Responses: I Sometimes Take Away Television Privileges For Discipline (According To Other Parents) . .	47
XIX. Statement Sixteen Responses: Television Is Sometimes Used As A Babysitter (According To Other Parents)	48
XX. Statement Seventeen Responses: It Is Important For Parents To Control The Amount Of Time Children Watch Television (According To Other Parents)	49
XXI. Statement Eighteen Responses: It is Important For Parents To Control The Kinds Of Programs Children Watch (According To Other Parents)	50
XXII. Ranking Of Statements From Greatest Extent Of Agreement To Least Extent of Agreement	53

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Television is a part of the lives of our children. According to Kate Moody, many people have studied the effects of television on children, but parents need more information to help their children avoid any negative effects of television during their most important developmental years.¹

Ellen Wartella has done extensive research and written about children and television. According to Wartella, children can be categorized into three different age groups.²

Preschool age children will be fascinated by what they see on television and will become regular viewers. These children are less than five years old and have limited understanding of what they view on the television screen. They are primarily attracted to the sounds, colors, and movement, rather than program content.

The second group is comprised of early elementary children who would be in kindergarten to the third grade and range in age from five to eight years old. Children in this age group prefer to watch cartoons. These children have difficulty understanding the plot and story line of

television programs except those designed specifically for children. Young viewers would have little understanding of an advertiser's point of view (their intention to sell a product); therefore, they are susceptible to wanting whatever they see on television. As these children near the third grade, they begin to prefer more adult-oriented programs.

The late elementary group includes children in grades four to seven and range in age from nine to twelve years old. By this age children have a more complete understanding of television. They begin to watch cartoons less and are able to make sense of the plot. Children in this age group are more competent viewers, however, they are still limited in their understanding.

For parents, the television may provide a built-in babysitter, an educational resource for their child to learn about the world, or a distraction which competes for young minds, offering entertainment rather than educational opportunity. John Irwin writes in his newspaper article titled "Television Temperance," "Ever since the late 1940's, when it (TV) injected itself into America's mainstream, it has been alternately hailed for its potential and hissed for its failure to reach that potential."³

Parents make choices as to how and why they allow their children to watch television. Some parents may be concerned with what their children watch and the amount of time the children spend watching television. Other parents may sigh

with relief as the children sit and gaze at the glittering fare of television shows because the television offers inexpensive and convenient babysitting.

Wilbur Schramm, Jack Lyle, and Edwin B. Parker conducted extensive research on children and television. Their research spanned three years. They worked with 6,000 children, 2,000 parents, and more than 300 teachers. One summary from the study recorded the findings on children's television as follows:

For some children under some conditions, some television is harmful. For other children under the same conditions, or for the same children under other conditions, it may be beneficial. For most children, under most conditions, most television is probably neither particularly harmful nor particularly beneficial.⁴

This summary is perhaps oversimplified, but it helps to accent the problem of studying children and television. There is no simple method that dictates the type of effect television may have on every child.

Background

The people in the television industry are responsible for providing viewing choices at appropriate times. Parents should be responsible for the amount of time children are allowed to watch television and the kind of programs they watch, according to F. Earle Barcus.⁵

The research literature indicates parents are the single most important intervening variable in alleviating possible negative effects of television. According to

Wilbur Schramm, "No matter what the influence of television or any other medium might be, they (parents) have the power to counteract almost anything that is bad for normal children in it."⁶

There are specific ways parents can be involved in the viewing habits of their children to reduce the possibility of harmful effects. According to the authors of Mass Media IV, four ways parents may be helpful include:⁷

- 1) Setting an example and avoiding habitual viewing patterns.
- 2) Controlling the amount of time spent viewing.
- 3) Supervising the kinds of programs viewed.
- 4) Viewing television with children and interacting with them before, during, and after the exposure.

There is limited information about the role parents allow television to have in the lives of their children.⁸ The preliminary research for this project failed to uncover even one study which asked the parents why they allowed their children to watch television. According to Hiebert, Ungurait, and Bohn:

Research unfortunately indicates that parents in most American families do not restrict either how much television their children watch or what TV shows their children view. And seldom, if ever, do parents discuss TV programs with their children. One reason why most parents do not worry about their children's TV viewing may be that parents do not know how much television their children watch. Yet, even as parents fail to supervise their children, more than half the adults in America express the opinion that excessive TV viewing is responsible for the poor state of education in America.⁹

Purpose and Value of the Study

Do American families restrict how much television their children watch and what types of programs the children watch? According to the authors of Mass Media IV, the answer is no. The purpose of this research was to discover the role parents give to television for their children and to learn if parents understand their need to limit viewing times and program choices.

The resulting information and findings should be of interest to several groups. Parents will be able to compare how they would respond to how the study group responded to the various statements reflecting why they allow their children to watch television. The comparison can be one way to help parents understand the important role they have as regulators of their children's television viewing habits.

Television producers should be interested to know what feelings parents have about television for their children. Television stations may want to produce informative programs about ways parents can and should be involved in their children's television viewing habits. Programmers will benefit by understanding viewers and parents of viewers better. Other researchers may find a basis for further research which is focused on what the parent's role should be regarding a child's television viewing habits.

Perhaps the most important group to benefit from the findings of this research will be educators. The students in schools today have been raised on a steady diet of

television. "If educators are out of touch with television, they are out of touch with an important force in people's lives."¹⁰ Educators can use the findings of this work to teach future parents how to monitor television in the lives of their children.

Statement of the Problem

Children will view television and interpret what they see based on their developmental level.¹¹ The child is introduced to comedy, drama, animation, and to mass entertainment via television. According to George Comstock, "Television is initially a pacifier upon which parents rely, and quite soon becomes a source of information about much that is unfamiliar and sometimes disconcerting or alarming to parents."¹²

Studies which have concentrated on children and television have produced few answers concerning the effects television has on children. Does television make children more violent or does television lull children into becoming boring human beings? Does watching television cause children to do poorly in school or does television educate young people about the world around them? While much has been written, the answers are still not clear. Most writers will agree the parent can be one of the most positive factors in avoiding negative effects on children which are attributed to television viewing.

The uses and gratification approach to research was used to determine why parents allow their children to watch television. This method explores the way individuals (parents in this study) use mass media communication to satisfy their needs and achieve their goals. Uses and gratification research contends the audience goes to the media for specific gratification, using the mass media rather than being used by the mass media, according to Mary Cassata and Molefi Asante.¹³ This study focused on the uses parents find for television in the lives of their children and what gratification television serves for the parents when they allow their children to watch television.

The method of research was a questionnaire. The respondents are parents of second and sixth grade students in two Oklahoma City schools. The questionnaire was designed to ask parents their reasons for allowing children to watch television. The statements were developed by talking with parents and asking them what reasons they had for allowing their children view television.

Chapter two presents a review of the literature dealing with children and television. Chapter three explains the methodology employed to answer the research question: What are the reasons parents give for allowing their children to watch television? Chapter four presents the findings, and chapter five provides a summary, conclusions and recommendations resulting from the research.

ENDNOTES

¹Kate Moody, Growing Up On Television - The TV Effect, (New York: Times Books, 1980) p. 132.

²Ellen Wartella, "The Child As A Viewer", in Education For The Television Age, ed. Milton E. Ploghoft and James A. Anderson (Athens: The Cooperative Center For Social Sciences, 1981), p. 29-32.

³John Irwin, "Television Temperance," Edmond Sun, March 5, 1989, Section B, p. 1, cols 1-6.

⁴George Comstock, Television In America, (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications Inc., 1980) p. 98.

⁵F. Earle Barcus, Images Of Life On Children's Television, (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1983) p. 27.

⁶Wilbur Schramm, Jack Lyle, and Edwin B. Parker, Television In The Lives Of Our Children (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1961), pp. 179-184.

⁷Ray E. Hiebert,, Donald F. Ungurait, and Thomas W. Bohn. Mass Media IV. (New York: Longman Inc., 1985) p. 260.

⁸Moody, p. 132.

⁹Hiebert, Ungurait, and Bohn, p. 260.

¹⁰Moody, p. 154.

¹¹Mariann Winick and Charles Winick, The Television Experience: What Children See, (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications Inc., 1979) p. 185.

¹²Comstock, p. 98.

¹³Mary B. Cassata and Molefi K. Asante, Mass Communication Principles and Practices, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1979) p. 259.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Television has an enormous effect on society. According to Nielsen research, there are more than 90 million homes in the United States. Only 2% of these homes do not have a television set. Almost 70% of the homes have more than one television. The average household set is on nearly seven hours a day.¹

Cable television is now installed in more than 47 million households. Most cable services offer twenty or more channels and provide programming day and night.²

Nielsen's research presents evidence that children are a substantial portion of the total television audience. On Monday through Friday afternoons, children and teenagers comprise 28% of the total viewing audience.³ In the book, The Early Window, the authors suggest only a small part of what children watch on television is considered to be "children's programming."⁴ Most of the programs children watch are created for the adult or family audiences.

Children form a part of their picture of the world from images they see on television. Donna Cross, author of the book Mediaspeak, writes that work, play, and even our sleep are to some extent regulated by television.⁵ According to

John Irwin, statistics about children's television should be sobering for anyone, particularly those who have children spending many of their waking hours staring mindlessly at a television set.⁶

Children's Understanding of Television Characters

Research conducted by Joanne Quarforth explored children's understanding of the nature of television characters.⁷ Her work assessed children's abilities to differentiate between human, animated, and puppet characters. She found that most children did not come to realize that being alive and having the ability to move autonomously are characteristic of human characters and not of animated or puppet characters before the third or fourth grade.⁸ According to the author:

Many adults assume that because it is obvious to them that cartoon characters are "make-believe," the same fact must be as obvious to children. This study has demonstrated, however, that young children do not discriminate clearly between different types of television characters. Given that the rate of violence on children's cartoon programs is three times the rate of violence on other television programs, it would make sense to look more carefully at what young children learn from cartoon programs.⁹

Quarforth found that children who are younger than the fourth grade need more parental guidance because of their inability to discriminate between realistic and make-believe characters.

Children and News

Children view news and world events differently than adults. Dr. Ron Slaby, a child psychologist at Harvard University's Graduate School of Education, believes most children are exposed to news programs by chance because parents leave the news on all the time and don't think the kids are watching.¹⁰ Dr. Joanne Cantor, professor of communication arts at the University of Wisconsin, studying how television can frighten children, found young children can't easily distinguish between fact and fantasy, so the images of painful reality on the six o'clock news can result in a frightening question: "Will this thing happen to me?"¹¹

Peggy Charren, president of the media-watch group Action for Children's Television (ACT), writes that parents can help children cope with the issues presented in the news. ACT literature offers several common sense suggestions to parents.¹²

The television industry, in response to ACT petitions, created news shows specifically designed for children.¹³ From 1971 to 1987, CBS News offered short news stories throughout their Saturday morning schedule. Other programs, such as 3-2-1 Contact and Mister Rogers' Neighborhood, have dealt with a specific topic, like the Challenger disaster, on a level for children.¹⁴

Children and Aggression

Does watching violence and aggression on television cause children to imitate such behaviors? The potential effect of television has been studied extensively. Studies show a correlation between some children viewing violent programming and resulting violent, aggressive, or antisocial behavior.¹⁵ A study conducted by Schramm, Lyle and Parker presented a collection of documented instances in which television was implicated in the aggressive or antisocial behavior of otherwise innocent youths.¹⁶

Children who are heavy viewers of television are more willing to use violent behaviors as a means of solving personal problems. Television violence teaches children a way of getting what they want that is not only permissible on the screen, but usually insures the aggressors get what they want.¹⁷

This does not mean that every child watching a violent program will become violent and/or aggressive. The evidence produced by research to date suggests that different children may react differently to the same program. One book, Children and the Faces Of Television, devoted a whole chapter to reviewing the TV violence literature for possible influences. The chapter by Aimee Dorr and Peter Kovaric entitled "Some of the People Some of the Time--But Which People?" concluded:

First, we conclude that television violence seems to be capable of affecting viewers of both sexes and varying ages, social classes, ethnicities, personality characteristics, and levels of usual aggressiveness. Second, we conclude that males and females are equally likely to be influenced by exposure but that within each sex those who are more aggressive are more likely to be influenced. We will also advance the tentative conclusion that "middle-aged" children, those between the ages of about 8 and 12, are somewhat more likely to be affected than are either younger or older youth. Third, we conclude that in actual behavior boys are more likely to be aggressive than are girls, and, by definition, delinquents and others who are measured as more aggressive in their daily behavior are more aggressive than are their obvious comparison groups. Fourth, we conclude that in terms of actual viewing of and preference for televised violence, boys are likely to exceed girls and members of the working class are likely to exceed those of the middle class.¹⁸

This explanation is similar to Schramm's which stated, "For some children under some conditions, some television is harmful."¹⁹ TV violence has a large effect on a small percentage of children and a small effect on a large percentage of children.

The Surgeon General published a report in March 1972 on the effects of television on children.²⁰ The report prompted other studies to confirm and refute some of the conclusions from that study. Since then, many studies have been conducted on the findings of the report. The authors of The Early Window summarized briefly their general conclusions found after studying the multiple studies done through 1982. They describe three specific effects of television violence parents should be aware of as they regulate their children's television viewing habits:²¹

- (1) High-action content on television is arousing to viewers.
- (2) TV violence may be imitated.
- (3) TV violence conveys attitudes and values about violence, aggression, and antisocial behavior.

Children and Advertising

Because television in the United States depends on commercials to create a profit, stockholders pressure the media to show advertisements that will sell as effectively as possible.²² Children are still in the process of developing the skills and experience necessary to evaluate advertising and to make purchase decisions. Certain advertising techniques and strategies appropriate for adults may be confusing or misleading to children.

Action for Children's Television (ACT) convinced the National Science Foundation to sponsor a review of the research as to the effects of advertising on children. The findings, which appeared in 1977, reported the following:

1. Children do not understand that the primary intent of advertising is to sell.
2. Children do not understand disclaimers.
3. Commercials on television are effective in developing active consumerism in children.
4. As a result of seeing TV commercials, children attempt to persuade parents to make certain purchases, which on occasion leads to conflict between parent and child.

5. Very strong evidence exists that TV advertising generates product awareness but that children become less accepting and finally skeptical of advertising claims by the time they reach their teens.
6. Very young children have difficulty perceiving the difference between advertising and program content.²³

The Children's Advertising Review Unit (CARU) has developed a set of guidelines for advertisers. These guidelines are to help delineate those areas that need particular attention to help avoid deceptive advertising messages to children. Conscientious advertisers should examine the total advertising message to be certain that the net communication will not mislead or misinform children.²⁴

When advertisements are found to be misleading, inaccurate or inconsistent with the guidelines, CARU seeks changes on a case-by-case basis through the voluntary cooperation of advertiser. Each case decision is reported in the National Advertising Division Case Report which is published monthly and distributed nationally.²⁵

The Role of Parents

The literature review of children's television indicates several reasons for concern and involvement by parents. Children do not have a clear understanding of characters they see on television, they may be frightened by news stories, they may imitate or become aggressive by watching violent behavior on television and they may be

misled by advertisements when they do not understand the intent of the advertiser.

Parents could be better informed of differences between the adult and child viewer. Adults' perceptions of television differ dramatically from children's.²⁶ As children grow and mature, they are better equipped mentally to deal with the complexities of television.

The maturational differential is part of the predisposition or tendency system that a child brings to the television viewing situation. The content on the screen only assumes meaning through the child's readiness and ability to receive and interpret it. Any short-term impact or ultimate outcome of television is related to the relative degree of development of the young viewer. The degree of development may affect selective attention, perception, retention, influence, and reinforcement.²⁷

Authors have provided several suggestions for ways parents can be involved in the television viewing of their children. According to Kate Moody, the first and perhaps most important way parents can help their children avoid the possible negative effects of television is to talk with their children.²⁸ Parents who ask questions and discuss what their children see on television can help explain any misinformation the children may internalize from what they viewed on television. Parents have the opportunity to use television as a teaching tool by opening up communication about a show rather than allowing television to have a negative effect on their children.

Another suggestion is to select appropriate programs for the children to watch. Dr. Diane Kittredge, who is an

assistant professor of pediatrics at the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center wrote, "Parents who don't control their children's television viewing are not doing them any favors."²⁹ She also believes parents are better able to judge what kinds of programs are best for the child's age and temperament. The mother and/or father should make decisions about how much television should be watched.

Parents are cautioned not to use television viewing as a reward or take away viewing privileges as a form of punishment. Dr. Kittredge and other authors agreed this puts too much value on television viewing and may have a negative impact on the child.³⁰

Why Parents Allow Children to Watch TV

This research asked parents to respond to a list of statements suggesting why they allow their children to watch television. The data was analyzed to see if there were factors which caused groups of parents to answer differently. Some of the factors included were the gender of the child, household income, and size of the family.

ENDNOTES

¹Broadcasting/Cable yearbook '89, Broadcasting Publications Inc., p. A-3.

²Ibid., p. D-3.

³Ibid., p. G-16.

⁴Robert M. Liebert, Joyce N. Sprafkin, and Emily S. Davidson, The Early Window - Effects Of Television On Children And Youth, New York: Pergamon Press, 1982, p. 6.

⁵Donna Woolfolk Cross, Mediaspeak How Television Makes Up Your Mind, New York: New American Library 1984, p. 2.

⁶John Irwin, "Television Temperance," Edmond Sun, March 5, 1989, Section B, p. 1, col. 1-6.

⁷Joanne M. Quarforth, "Children's Understanding of the Nature of Television Characters." Journal of Communication, 29, No. 3, (Summer 1979), p. 210.

⁸Ibid., p. 214.

⁹Ibid., p. 218.

¹⁰Russell Miller, "The 6:00 News - How Children View World Events." CTW Sesame Street Magazine Parents' Guide, March 1989, pp. 13-14.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Liebert, Sprafkin, and Davidson, p. 34.

¹³Miller, p. 14.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Kate Moody, Growing up on Television - The TV Effect, New York: Times Books, 1980, p. 88.

¹⁶Liebert, Sprafkin, and Davidson, p. 7.

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 114-129.

¹⁸Aimee Dorr and Peter Kovaric, "Some of the People Some of the Time--But Which People?" in Children And The Faces Of Television: Teaching, Violence, Selling, ed. E. L. Palmer and A. Dorr, New York: Academic Press, 1980, pp. 193-194.

¹⁹George Comstock, Television In America, (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications Inc., 1980) p. 98.

²⁰Liebert, Sprafkin, Davidson, p. 105.

²¹Ibid., p. 129.

²²Ibid., p. 10.

²³Hiebert, Ungurait, and Bohn, p. 261.

²⁴Self-Regulatory Guidelines For Children's Advertising (New York, New York: National Advertising Division, Council of Better Business Bureaus, Inc., 1983), pp. 3-10.

²⁵NAD Case Report (National Advertising Division, Council of Better Business Bureaus, Inc., Special Report No. 4, March 1986), pp. 1-12.

²⁶Mariann Pezzella Winick and Charles Winick, The Television Experience - What Children See, (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications Inc., 1979), p. 12-15.

²⁷Ibid., p. 189, 190.

²⁸Moody, p. 89.

²⁹"Controlling Kids' TV Habits Important", The Daily Oklahoman, Dec. 10, 1987, p. 13.

³⁰Ibid.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The research question in this study was, what reasons do parents give for allowing their children to watch television? The method of research was a survey.

The respondents were parents of second and sixth grade students in two Oklahoma City schools. In order to have a sample group large enough to draw accurate conclusions, at least two schools were required. The schools were chosen because of their location on opposite sides of the Oklahoma City area and the willingness of the principals to participate in this research.

A questionnaire was used for this research because it is best adapted to obtaining personal and social facts, beliefs and attitudes.¹ This research utilized a relatively small nonrandom sample to learn what reasons parents agree are important for allowing their children to watch television. The parents of second and sixth grade students were chosen to learn if parents may answer differently for older children since their understanding of television should be more advanced as suggested by Ellen Wartella.²

No research could be found which closely replicated this project. Therefore, statements were gathered

informally from parents about their children's television viewing habits. These statements were examined by a focus group of graduate students at Oklahoma State University in the fall of 1987. The revised statements were then given in a pretest to the second and sixth grade parents at Oakdale school the same semester. Based on the responses received from this sample group, the statements were reworked once again and presented in the form described in Chapter IV of this paper.

Parents were asked to rate each item from strongly agree to strongly disagree. A summated rating scale, or Likert-type scale was used to place each individual somewhere on an agreement continuum for each statement. Differences between parental answers were also examined between variables including gender of parent, gender of child, parent working outside of the home or not, and others.

Sample Groups

Oakdale Elementary and Will Rogers Elementary were chosen as testing sites. A total of 46 second graders and 44 sixth graders took the questionnaire home to their parents and returned them to the appropriate teacher. Two schools were used to obtain an adequate sample size. Differences in responses were not expected between the schools; however, there were some significant differences which should be noted that were considered in the research:

1. Oakdale school is much smaller than Will Rogers.
(Oakdale = 170 students, Will Rogers = 1640 students)
2. Oakdale school is a traditional school with closed classrooms. Will Rogers is an open school with a more modern approach to learning. This difference may reflect some ideological difference between parents at each school and could influence how the parents think about their children's viewing habits.
3. The income of parents at Oakdale school is expected to differ from parents of Will Rogers. The questionnaire will provide data for this comparison. Typically, lower income families watch more television than high income families.³ If there is a difference in parental income, the lower income group may differ in their response to the statements.

There were a total of 90 questionnaires sent home with the students. A different color paper was used for each of the four classes for easy identification.

<u>CLASS</u>	<u>COLOR</u>
Oakdale second grade	Blue
Oakdale sixth grade	White
Will Rogers second grade	Yellow
Will Rogers sixth grade	Gray

The choice of second and sixth grade students was based on research findings which indicate children's understanding of the nature of television increases systematically across the early school years.⁴ Based on this information, the hypothesis for these two age groups should suggest parents would be more permissive for sixth graders than second graders.

Hypothesis

The literature review from chapter two suggested the hypothesis or possible results from this study would reveal that some and possibly all of the variables could produce different answers from parents. Parents may differ on their answers depending on the gender of the child. There may also be significant differences between the way a parent will answer for a second grader compared to a sixth grader. One would not expect significant differences between the two schools.

Two of the questions asked parents if they use television to keep their children occupied or use television as a babysitter. The pretest for this survey demonstrated parents were not willing to admit they use television as a babysitter. The question was asked twice in the questionnaire to note differences between how a parent would answer for themselves and how they might answer for other parents.

Survey Instrument

The survey instrument was designed to allow parents to agree/disagree with reasons other parents gave for allowing their children to watch television. The statements were developed by talking with twenty-three parents individually and asking each of them the reasons they would give for allowing their children to watch television. The parents

used to develop the initial list were from a variety of occupations. People were chosen who were available to talk about the project. This sample group was not limited to parents with children in the second or sixth grade. Young parents and old were interviewed for their responses.

The next step in developing the questionnaire included the use of a focus group to choose the best statement wording and to combine any similar statements into one. A pretest was utilized to provide a preliminary run-through of the questionnaire format and return information. It was discovered that parents may not have been responding honestly to some of the statements. Also, there was the possibility for the parents to respond the same to each statement.

Based on what was learned in the pretest, changes were made in the final form of the questionnaire. To guard against a respondent simply marking all responses the same if he/she thought they could agree or disagree with all statements equally, some of the statements were changed from positive to negative. For example statement number two was changed from, "Watching television is a good family activity," to "Watching television is not a good family activity."

A cover letter was provided with each questionnaire. A copy of this letter can be found in the appendix section. This note explained to the parent the type of information needed. There was also a statement of assurance to each

parent in the letter that their identity would not be revealed to anyone. Other information included how to return the questionnaire and the name, address, and phone number of the researcher for any questions or problems that may arise.

Near the end of the questionnaire there were four statements which the parent was asked to answer as most other parents would. This utilized the technique of projection. People are often more objective about their own feelings on sensitive issues when they don't have to answer directly about themselves. These four statements were compared to previous statements to note any changes in answers. A significant difference in answers may indicate parents were answering as they think they should instead of honestly.

Data Collection Procedures

Mailing the questionnaire to the parents was not possible because one of the school principals would not provide the names and addresses of parents without permission from each parent. The questionnaire was handed out in class by the teachers of second and sixth graders at two Oklahoma City schools. The teachers were asked to be responsible for tracking each form and make sure as many were returned as soon as possible. Each instructor kept a list of which students returned their questionnaires. A

follow-up request was sent home with those students who did not return their questionnaires.

The questionnaires were delivered to each school on March 27, 1989. Procedural information was printed on the front of each packet of questionnaires. The teachers were asked to hand out the forms on that day. The questionnaires were to be returned on April 5, 1989. This allowed almost two weeks to complete and return them. The teacher in each classroom was encouraged to have the questionnaires returned sooner than the April 5 deadline if possible. The teacher was also responsible for keeping track of which students returned their parent's responses.

On Monday, April 3, the principal of each school was contacted. Both were asked to check on how the questionnaires were coming in and how many reminder notices were needed. Reminders were sent home with students who had not returned their forms on April 4. Two extra school days were allowed to receive any extras. On Monday, April 10, all of the returned questionnaires were picked up.

Analysis and Presentation

The dependent variable in this study was the ranking of the list of reasons parents give for allowing their children to watch television. Each statement will have a possible score of five points: Strongly Agree = 1, Agree = 2, Neutral = 3, Disagree = 4, and Strongly Disagree = 5.

There were many independent variables which might have been factors in this research. Independent variables included were:

- 1) Parents of second graders compared to parents of sixth graders.
- 2) Family size.
- 3) Family income.
- 4) Gender of children.
- 5) Parent employed or unemployed.
- 6) Oakdale versus Will Rogers.

The null hypothesis is a statistical proposition which states there will be no difference between the variables.⁵ MYSTAT is a statistical software package that will be used to analyze the results of the survey. Each of the independent variables was statistically tested for significant differences in answers. Do parents give different reasons for boy children than for their girls? Would a family with a large number of children answer differently than parents with one child? The analysis of data collected from the questionnaire was expected to provide answers to these questions and others related to the six variables listed above.

The research question to be answered by this study was, what are the reasons parents give for allowing their children to watch television? The list was carefully developed. The questionnaire provided responses from parents indicating which statements they agree are valid reasons for allowing their children to watch television. Each statement from the questionnaire was analyzed in

chapter four. The percentage of parents that agreed and disagreed with the statement was provided along with any significant differences found between the demographic variables.

ENDNOTES

¹Fred N. Kerlinger, Foundations Of Behavioral Research, 3rd ed., (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1986) p. 386.

²Ellen Wartella, "The Child As A Viewer", in Education For The Television Age, ed. Milton E. Ploghoft and James A. Anderson (Athens: The Cooperative Center For Social Sciences, 1981), p. 29-32.

³Ray E. Hiebert,, Donald F. Ungurait, and Thomas W. Bohn. Mass Media IV. (New York: Longman Inc., 1985) p. 260.

⁴Joanne M. Quarforth, "Children's Understanding of the Nature of Television Characters." Journal of Communication, Summer 1979, p. 217.

⁵Kerlinger, p. 189.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Response Rate

The parents and children had a high return rate on the questionnaires. There were only five questionnaires that were not returned. This means 85 out of 90, or 94 percent of the questionnaires were filled out and tabulated as part of this research project. Table I below details the return of the questionnaires.

There were two questionnaires out of the five not returned that were from the same family. One child was in the second grade and one child was in the sixth grade. The teacher in both classes tried to have the parents return the questionnaire but the parents refused. The only reason they provided through their children was it looked like too much trouble.

The other three questionnaires were not returned. No reason or explanation was given for why these parents refused to respond.

TABLE I
RESPONSE RATE FOR RETURN
OF SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRES

School And Grade	Sent	Returned	% Return
Oakdale second grade	21	19	90%
Will Rogers second grade	25	23	92%
Oakdale sixth grade	21	20	95%
Will Rogers Sixth grade	23	23	100%
Overall	90	85	94%

Demographics of Respondents

The sample group chosen for this survey was not intended to be a random sample. This research project targeted parents of second and sixth grade children and focused on the city of Oklahoma City. An explanation of some of the demographics of the parents who responded to this questionnaire are important to the interpretation of results and for any comparison of results and conclusions to other communities.

In planning for this research, the person who was to fill out the questionnaire was to be the primary care giver and, in most cases, this was expected to be the mother. Out

of the sample group, 16 percent of the respondents were fathers and 84 percent were mothers.

Eleven parents responded that they were single parents. This group represents 13 percent of the parents. Without a spouse to share the parenting duties with, this group was expected to answer differently than families with a father and mother.¹

Seventy-three percent of the families responding to the questionnaire have both parents working outside the home. Twenty-seven percent, or fewer than one third of the responses, indicate one parent stays at home. These figures reflect the fact that a substantial number of mothers work outside the home.

TABLE II
THE NUMBER OF CHILDREN IN
RESPONDENT'S FAMILY

# Of Children	# Of Responses	% Of Responses
one	14	16%
two	48	57%
three	14	16%
four	4	5%
five	4	5%
six	1	1%

Eighty-eight percent of the families who responded have three or fewer children (see Table II). Over half (56%) of the families in this study have two children. Families with more than three children comprise only 11 percent of the total group. The results of families with one child compared to families with more than one child showed no significant difference in response ($p > .05$).

One hypothesis of this research was that parents might answer differently for boys than for girls. The sample group for this research had 38 parents who answered for male children and 47 parents who answered for female children. Once again, no statistical difference in answers was found between the way parents answered for their male or female children ($p > .05$).

Parents were generally willing to answer every question on the questionnaire with the exception of providing their annual household income. Eleven parents refused to provide the information requested. This was the only question that caused such a high number of parents to refuse an answer. There was not enough difference between the two schools in terms of household income to compare differences in parental responses based on how much money the parents make.

TABLE III
ANNUAL HOUSEHOLD INCOME
OF SURVEY GROUP

Income	Oakdale		Will Rogers		Total	
	(N)	(%)	(N)	(%)	(N)	(%)
Below \$10,000		0%	1	2%	1	1%
\$10,000-\$30,000	12	31%	11	24%	23	27%
\$30,000-\$50,000	10	26%	12	26%	22	26%
Above \$50,000	13	33%	15	33%	28	33%
No Response	4	10%	7	15%	11	13%
Total	39	100%	46	100%	85	100%

Why Do Parents Allow Their Children to Watch TV?

This section of the paper is dedicated to answering the research question. The tally of parental responses will be provided with each statement.

Sixty-seven percent of the parents either agreed or strongly agreed to the statement their children learn about the world from television (See Table IV). On statements that allude to children learning from television, parents agreed, but only eight percent of the parents marked the strong agreement category. Education has been listed by parents as one advantage of television for children in previous studies conducted by the Roper organization.² In the 1980 report, 76 percent of the sample group mentioned

education as a positive factor for allowing children to watch television.

TABLE IV
STATEMENT ONE RESPONSES: MY CHILD
LEARNS ABOUT OTHER PARTS OF THE
WORLD BY WATCHING TELEVISION

Intensity	# Of Responses	% Of Responses
Strongly Agree	7	8%
Agree	50	59%
Neutral	19	22%
Disagree	9	11%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%

The next statement, watching television is not a good family activity, is phrased negatively and parents tended to disagree (See Table V). Only 18 percent agreed with the statement while 57 percent disagreed. Most parents indicated they feel television is a good family activity.

This coincides with research conducted by Roper. According to their findings, many families report they feel watching television is a good family activity; however, many households have more than one television set and often do not watch television as a family.³

TABLE V
STATEMENT TWO RESPONSES: WATCHING
TELEVISION IS NOT A GOOD
FAMILY ACTIVITY

Intensity	# Of Responses	% Of Responses
Strongly Agree	2	2%
Agree	13	15%
Neutral	22	26%
Disagree	42	50%
Strongly Disagree	6	7%

TABLE VI
STATEMENT THREE RESPONSES: VIEWING TV AT
HOME PROVIDES ME WITH THE OPPORTUNITY
TO SELECT PROGRAMS WHICH I FEEL
ARE APPROPRIATE FOR MY CHILD

Intensity	# Of Responses	% Of Responses
Strongly Agree	14	16%
Agree	54	64%
Neutral	6	7%
Disagree	6	7%
Strongly Disagree	4	5%
No Response	1	1%

Many parents (80%) agreed television viewing at home allows the parents to select programs which they feel are appropriate for their children. This response from parents

is in agreement with the views of from Dr. Diane Kittredge who advocates parents should control and monitor what their children watch.⁴

In the book, The Changing Television Audience In America, author Robert Bower asked parents if they had rules that might be used to control their children's television viewing. The more education a parent had, the more they agreed "definite rules" were necessary to control viewing times and program content.⁵

TABLE VII

STATEMENT FOUR RESPONSES: TELEVISION
KEEPS MY CHILD OCCUPIED SO I'M
FREE TO DO OTHER TASKS

Intensity	# Of Responses	% Of Responses
Strongly Agree	3	4%
Agree	15	18%
Neutral	14	16%
Disagree	41	48%
Strongly Disagree	12	14%

Parents did not agree the television keeps their children occupied so they are free to do other tasks. The wording of this statement might have been preceded with the

word "sometimes" to produce more accurate parental feelings. One parent even wrote beside her answer, "Not Me!"

TABLE VIII
STATEMENT FIVE RESPONSES: TELEVISION
HELPS KEEP MY CHILD AT HOME SO I
CAN KNOW WHERE HE/SHE IS

Intensity	# Of Responses	% Of Responses
Strongly Agree	2	2%
Agree	12	14%
Neutral	13	15%
Disagree	44	52%
Strongly Disagree	14	17%

In the preliminary work of putting together the survey, some parents indicated they let their children watch television rather than going to the movies or going someplace where the parent could not oversee what their kids were doing. Sixty-nine percent of the parents who filled out the questionnaire disagreed with the statement in this research.

TABLE IX
STATEMENT SIX RESPONSES: I DO NOT USE
TELEVISION AS A REWARD FOR GOOD
BEHAVIOR FOR MY CHILD

Intensity	# Of Responses	% Of Responses
Strongly Agree	27	32%
Agree	35	41%
Neutral	3	4%
Disagree	11	12%
Strongly Disagree	9	11%

Seventy-three percent of the parents indicated they do not use television as a reward for good behavior. However, table XVIII shows they agreed with the statement, "I sometimes take away television privileges for discipline." Dr. Diane Kittredge recommends, "Parents should not use TV as a reward or punishment because it places too much value on television."⁶ Parents agreed they would not use television viewing for their children as a reward, but may take away privileges as punishment.

TABLE X
STATEMENT TEN RESPONSES: TELEVISION IS
LOW COST ENTERTAINMENT FOR MY CHILD

Intensity	# Of Responses	% Of Responses
Strongly Agree	8	9%
Agree	46	54%
Neutral	16	19%
Disagree	10	12%
Strongly Disagree	5	6%

Most parents (63%) agreed that "low cost entertainment" was a good reason for allowing children to watch television. Unless parents are paying for cable services, there is no cost involved after the purchase of a television set. Only one respondent to this questionnaire said there was not a television set in her home. The parent felt there are more appropriate forms of entertainment for her children at home than television. This parent did add, "Our children's exposure to T.V. is at school and at our jobs, when they are waiting for their mom to finish teaching class."

TABLE XI
STATEMENT EIGHT RESPONSES: I LIKE
FOR MY CHILD TO WATCH TELEVISION
BECAUSE HE/SHE ENJOYS IT

Intensity	# Of Responses	% Of Responses
Strongly Agree	4	5%
Agree	34	40%
Neutral	30	35%
Disagree	15	18%
Strongly Disagree	1	1%
No Response	1	1%

The results to this statement reflect mixed feelings from different parents. There were 45 percent of the parents who agreed they allow their children to watch because the kids enjoy television. More parents were neutral on this statement or disagreed. This statement should not be considered a reason most parents would allow their children to watch television.

TABLE XII
STATEMENT NINE RESPONSES: TELEVISION
HELPS MY CHILD TO LEARN

Intensity	# Of Responses	% Of Responses
Strongly Agree	7	8%
Agree	51	60%
Neutral	20	24%
Disagree	7	8%
Strongly Disagree	0	0

Table XII indicates parents perceive television has potential for educational possibilities. These results can once again be compared to Roper research. In 1980, 76 percent of the people who were asked what the main advantages of television for children listed education.⁷ Fewer parents agreed television helps children learn in the Oklahoma City study; however, 68 percent agreed. Robert Bower wrote, "Parents have seen education as a major advantage of television for children, and indeed, scientific researchers have been studying TV's educational effects ever since the appearance of the classic Schramm and Himmelweit studies."

TABLE XIII
STATEMENT TEN RESPONSES: TELEVISION
TEACHES MY CHILD TO WORK OUT
HIS/HER OWN PROBLEMS

Intensity	# Of Responses	% Of Responses
Strongly Agree	0	0%
Agree	8	9%
Neutral	17	20%
Disagree	42	50%
Strongly Disagree	17	20%
No Response	1	1%

Parents did not agree television teaches children to work out their problems. This statement would not represent a reason for allowing children to watch television.

TABLE XIV
STATEMENT ELEVEN RESPONSES: A CHILD
WHO DOES NOT WATCH TELEVISION IS
A MISFIT AMONG HIS/HER PEERS

Intensity	# Of Responses	% Of Responses
Strongly Agree	1	1%
Agree	6	7%
Neutral	15	18%
Disagree	45	53%
Strongly Disagree	18	21%

There was also disagreement with the statement which suggests a child should be allowed to watch television to fit in with his/her peers (Table XIV). Seventy-four percent of the responses reflected disagreement.

TABLE XV
STATEMENT TWELVE RESPONSES: TELEVISION
IS NOT AN APPROPRIATE PASTIME
FOR CHILDREN

Intensity	# Of Responses	% Of Responses
Strongly Agree	9	11%
Agree	18	21%
Neutral	21	25%
Disagree	33	39%
Strongly Disagree	3	3%
No Response	1	1%

Parents are uneasy with suggesting the use of television as an appropriate pastime. Parents provided differing opinions with 32 percent agreeing television is not appropriate, 25 percent neutral, and 42 percent think television is an appropriate pastime. Parents may have differed on their response depending on the type of programming they were thinking of at the time they filled out the questionnaire. One parent wrote:

Television can be great entertainment and provide some good learning experiences. Our family has two or three programs a week we enjoy watching together. However, TV plays a small role in entertainment and recreational time for us. (The VCR provides more hours of entertainment time for us.) Television is strongly censored at our house, even early prime time is more explicit than I like. I recognize the subtle way many issues are brought to life and approved of in programs (i.e. - homosexuality, premarital sex).

According to this parent, there are ways to make the television "an appropriate pastime." Parental control over what is watched and how much the children watch may benefit children viewers.

TABLE XVI

STATEMENT THIRTEEN RESPONSES: TELEVISION
WATCHING IS A DIFFICULT HABIT
FOR CHILDREN TO BREAK

Intensity	# Of Responses	% Of Responses
Strongly Agree	17	20%
Agree	46	54%
Neutral	10	12%
Disagree	11	13%
Strongly Disagree	1	1%

The authors of The Early Window wrote, "Most children are exposed to television by the time they have had their first birthday and have become purposeful viewers with

favorite shows by the time they are three."⁸ Parents agreed that television is a difficult habit for children to break (74% agreed). Children are allowed to form habits of watching television and parents may not realize it is a formed habit, even at an early age.

TABLE XVII
STATEMENT FOURTEEN RESPONSES: TELEVISION
PROGRAMS PROVIDE A BASIS FOR
FAMILY DISCUSSION

Intensity	# Of Responses	% Of Responses
Strongly Agree	1	1%
Agree	45	53%
Neutral	20	23%
Disagree	15	18%
Strongly Disagree	4	5%

Parents agreed television programs provide a basis for family discussion. According to the authors of Mass Media IV, "Parents seldom if ever, discuss TV programs with their children."⁹ However, this statement is in conflict with the response of 54 percent of the parents who may allow their children to watch television as a basis for family discussions.

TABLE XVIII
STATEMENT FIFTEEN RESPONSES: I SOMETIMES
TAKE AWAY TELEVISION PRIVILEGES FOR
DISCIPLINE (ACCORDING TO
OTHER PARENTS)

Intensity	# Of Responses	% Of Responses
Strongly Agree	5	6%
Agree	56	66%
Neutral	5	6%
Disagree	14	16%
Strongly Disagree	2	2%
No Response	3	4%

More than 70 percent of the parents agreed with taking away television privileges for discipline purposes. One parent who did not agree wrote, "Children and parents should be able to communicate and come to an understanding without threats of losing television privileges or other privileges."

Contrast the response of this statement with "I do not use television as a reward for good behavior." Seventy-three percent said they would not use television as a reward, but 72 percent agreed with removing television privileges.

TABLE XIX

STATEMENT SIXTEEN RESPONSES: TELEVISION
IS SOMETIMES USED AS A BABYSITTER
(ACCORDING TO OTHER PARENTS)

Intensity	# Of Responses	% Of Responses
Strongly Agree	8	9%
Agree	60	71%
Neutral	3	4%
Disagree	12	14%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%
No Response	2	2%

The parents answered much differently when asked if other parents use the television as a babysitter than they did when asked if they use television to occupy their children. Eighty percent of the parents agreed other parents utilize the television as a babysitter while only 22 percent of the parents said they use television to keep their children occupied. One study in 1967 conducted by N. Johnson reported 78 percent of the families in his study used television as an "electronic babysitter."¹⁰

TABLE XX

STATEMENT SEVENTEEN RESPONSES: IT IS IMPORTANT
FOR PARENTS TO CONTROL THE AMOUNT OF TIME
CHILDREN WATCH TELEVISION (ACCORDING
TO OTHER PARENTS)

Intensity	# Of Responses	% Of Responses
Strongly Agree	27	32%
Agree	42	49%
Neutral	8	10%
Disagree	5	6%
Strongly Disagree	1	1%
No Response	2	2%

Parents provided a clear response of the importance of parents controlling the amount of time their children watch television. More than 80 percent of the parents agreed or strongly agreed parents should control their children's viewing time.

Parents indicated strong agreement with the importance of parents controlling the kinds of programs children watch (Table XXI). A total of 76 out of 85 parents either agreed or strongly agreed for a total of 89 percent agreement. One parent commented:

T.V. can be entertaining, but it should not be allowed to occupy a child's life. It's only something you can do when you can not go outside (nighttime, raining, etc.) and only then for certain shows. Too much television is bad for children.

Although there was not a statistical difference between the way parents answered between their second and sixth grade children, one parent indicated she would answer differently for one of her other children. She said:

The answers would really differ if I was filling it out with one of my other children in mind. The answers would also probably differ several months from now as I seem to go back and forth as to how strict or lax I am with television watching.

TABLE XXI

STATEMENT EIGHTEEN RESPONSES: IT IS IMPORTANT
FOR PARENTS TO CONTROL THE KINDS OF PROGRAMS
CHILDREN WATCH (ACCORDING
TO OTHER PARENTS)

Intensity	# Of Responses	% Of Responses
Strongly Agree	34	40%
Agree	42	49%
Neutral	4	5%
Disagree	3	4%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%
No Response	2	2%

ENDNOTES

¹Robert T. Bower, The Changing Television Audience In America (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), pp. 126-127.

²Bower, p. 118.

³Ibid., p. 109-112.

⁴"Controlling Kids' TV Habits Important", The Daily Oklahoman, Dec. 10, 1987, p. 13.

⁵Bower, p. 124-125.

⁶"Controlling Kids' TV Habits Important", The Daily Oklahoman, Dec. 10, 1987, p. 13.

⁷Bower, p. 118.

⁸Robert Liebert, Joyce N. Sprafkin, and Emily S. Davidson, The Early Window - Effects Of Television On Children And Youth, (New York: Pergamon Press, 1982), p. 2.

⁹Ray Eldon Hiebert, Donald F. Ungurait, and Thomas W. Bohn, Mass Media IV, (New York: Longman Inc., 1985), p. 260.

¹⁰Liebert, Sprafkin, and Davidson, p. 5.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

A concise listing of how the parents ranked the statements is presented in Table XXII to summarize the reasons parents gave for allowing their children to watch television. The mean score of each statement was used to provide a measure of which statements were most agreed with to those which were least agreed with. This method of ranking the statements corresponded to the analysis done in Chapter IV. The scale used was a five point scale from strongly agree (1) to strongly disagree (5). The number at the end of each statement in Table XXII represents the mean score of each statement.

TABLE XXII
RANKING OF STATEMENTS FROM GREATEST
EXTENT OF AGREEMENT TO LEAST
EXTENT OF AGREEMENT

-
1. It is important for parents to control the kinds of programs children watch. (1.711)
 2. It is important for parents to control the amount of time children watch television. (1.928)
 3. Viewing television at home provides me with the opportunity to select programs which I feel are appropriate for my child. (2.190)
 4. Television watching is a difficult habit to break. (2.212)
 5. Television is sometimes used as a babysitter. (2.229)
 6. Television helps my child to learn. (2.318)
 7. My child learns about other parts of the world by watching television. (2.353)
 8. I sometimes take away television privileges for discipline purposes. (2.415)
 9. Television is low cost entertainment for my child. (2.506)
 10. Watching television is a good family activity. (2.565)
 11. I like for my child to watch television because he/she enjoys it. (2.702)
 12. Television programs provide a basis for family discussion. (2.718)
 13. Television is an appropriate pastime for children. (2.964)
 14. Television keeps my child occupied so I'm free to do other tasks. (3.518)
 15. Television helps keep my child at home so I can know where he/she is. (3.659)
 16. I use television as a reward for good behavior. (3.706)

TABLE XXII (Continued)

17. Television teaches my child to work out his/her own problems. (3.810)
 18. A child who does not watch television is a misfit among his/her peers. (3.859)
-

This study of reasons why parents allow their children to watch television revealed some general attitudes and beliefs parents have as they allow television to become a part of their children's lives. Parents expressed a strong need and desire to have control of what the children watch on television and how much time children spend watching.

The educational value of television is important to parents. The response to children learning about other parts of the world (67% agree) and learning in general from television (68% agree) were considered good reasons for allowing children to watch television. However, when parents were asked if television helps children learn how to work out their problems, many parents did not agree (70% disagreed). More specific information is needed to learn why parents did not agree with the statement concerning children working out their problems. Many social issues are discussed on television such as drinking, smoking, drugs, lying, and how to get along with others. One mother wrote:

On a positive note, I do think the anti-drug commercials do make an impression on kids. Also, there are untapped sources of learning experiences that we and probably most families don't take advantage of, such as educational television and educational videotapes.

Conclusions

The hypotheses were not supported by the results of this study. Differences were expected between several different variables and these differences did not occur.

Parents were expected to respond differently for a second grade child than they did for a sixth grade child. Parents were expected to exercise greater control over the younger child's television viewing. No significant difference was found.

Family size was expected to make some difference in the way parents responded to some of the statements. Parents who are supervising one child may have more time or may exercise more control over a single child's television viewing than parents who have two or more children. No significant differences were found once again.

Family income has been a factor in some studies when comparing low income families to moderate or high income families. There was not enough difference between parents at Oakdale school and Will Rogers school to make a comparison. The two groups were almost identical in their reported family income.

Gender of children was expected to produce some difference in parental responses. The returned questionnaires indicated 38 of them were filled out for boys and 47 were filled out for girls. During early studies of children and television, parents were found to be more permissive with boys than girls. This study did not produce a significant difference between the responses given for boys and the responses given for girls.

A fifth demographic variable was included to learn if parents working outside the home may be a factor which may cause parents to respond to the statements differently. Seventy-three percent of the parents who responded indicated they do work outside the home. Only 27 percent of the parents who responded did not work outside the home. However, there was not a significant difference between how these parents responded.

The final category was to check for differences in responses between the two schools. The hypothesis was to find no difference between the schools. The conclusion from the results was that there was no difference between parental responses of Oakdale school parents and Will Rogers school parents.

There are some other conclusions which can be suggested by this research project. Parents want to have some authority to guide and manage what their children watch on television. One mother wrote on her survey, "My daughter

doesn't watch much television. What she watches are approved programs."

Parents are concerned about children viewing programs which are not appropriate. Some parents expressed a need for more quality television for children. One parent responded, "There is a dearth of programming which is appropriate for children to watch."

Some conflicts between responses occurred between the statement suggesting some parents use the television as a babysitter and the statement that television is used to occupy children. Parents were much more willing to admit "other" parents may use the television as a babysitter than they were to admitting they may use the television to occupy their own children. The percentage of parents who agreed they use the television to occupy their children was expected to be very high. Instead, slightly over 20 percent said they agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, compared to 80 percent who agreed "other" parents use the television as a babysitter.

Recommendations

Television is one of the most pervasive mediums of communication. Children are perceived as the most vulnerable audience segment because they spend a significant amount of time watching television and have a limited understanding of what they see and hear.

The first recommendation would be additional work based on this research. Several focus groups of parents could discuss the results and note statements where parents may not have been honest in their response. This group could add or delete statements to compile a new questionnaire.

The second recommendation comes from comments of a parent. This parent wrote:

I am not against television as a media. But at the present time the majority of viewing for the times my children are available to watch are sit-coms and most of these have unrealistic stories or stories inappropriate for child viewing. I think the special holiday programs, good documentaries, educational T.V. and the occasional fun programs like "Cosby" are great, but these are few and far between.

The comment above reflects one parent's opinion that there is a need for more quality programs for children. Research needs to be done which provides information about what types of programs are appropriate for children and compare findings to programming currently available.

A third recommendation is for more research to learn if parents know what their children are watching on television and how much time the children spend viewing. This information should be gathered and synthesized into a form that is easily understood and accessible to parents.

New technologies have created opportunities for parents to have more control over their children's television viewing than ever before.¹ Nielsen Media Research reports 50.9 percent of households with television sets also have a VCR.² Video cassette recorders permit families to record

programs at times when they are unable to watch for playback at their convenience. Pre-recorded videocassettes allow viewers to choose not only the time they wish to view but the material they want to see.³

Cable television offers exclusive programming designed for children. The Disney Channel is one cable service devoted to providing family programming and devotes mornings and afternoons to children with programs that entertain as well as educate.

As much as television has progressed and changed over the years, the research conclusions and parental concerns about children watching television remain much the same today. The conclusions set forth in the research conducted by Hilde Himmelwaite, A. N. Oppenheim, and Pamela Vance in 1958, still create a framework for children and television today.⁴ It appears that parental control is the best way to mitigate any negative effects of children watching television.

Parents, educators, producers, and advertisers have a responsibility to the young viewers of television. This research focused only on parents of second and sixth grade students. Most children are able to avoid any negative effects of television with some guidance from parents.

Most parents who responded felt television is an appropriate activity for children but added they realized some control and guidance is needed. Parents should involve themselves with their children's television viewing. They

should help children develop interests in other activities as well and not rely on the television as their only source of entertainment. One mother expressed how she feels television may be used in the lives of her children:

I think that television along with other types of entertainment can be overdone. On the other hand I feel that it is also a very good way to teach our children about world events and let them keep up with things that go on in our city and state (news). It also allows them to be entertained without having them away from their families and their home. I also enjoy television myself, for not only entertainment but for the educational part. I encourage my children to not overdo their watching of T.V. and to also keep up with reading books, magazines and the newspaper.

Parents continue to allow their children to watch television. The reasons parents indicated in order of importance have been presented earlier. Parents are also aware of the value of supervising how much television and types of programs children watch. The responses given by parents in this research are very comparable to other research conducted by Roper and other reputable researchers. Perhaps no further research is needed in this area because the conclusions are consistently similar.

Continued research will be beneficial to parents which informs and educates them about programming which will enhance a child's learning process. Other potentially valuable research could be done in several other areas. Would children's programs be better without commercials? Do the pay television channels, such as the Disney Channel or Nickelodeon, offer any advantages over broadcast network fare? What specific components make up an appealing and

informative program for children? All of these areas, plus many more, could provide parents, educators, programmers, or any interested person with information on responsible and appropriate children's programs.

Finally, television viewing by adults and children in our society is not going to vanish. Parents rationalize children's viewing as an educational, worthwhile activity and most feel TV is not a babysitter. Whether parents are totally honest about why their children watch television is not a significant factor. What is important is that the children will continue to readily absorb what is offered through this medium.

Since most children do not have the maturity or common sense to view television responsibly and objectively, it is important for the parents to play a part in their children's viewing. The parents' role may be to learn of benefits and dangers of television to children, or helping promote higher quality programs. The adults' best role may be as a monitor or guide to the most beneficial or enjoyable programming for their children.

Whatever role adults take in children's television viewing, it should not be a passive one. Parents can be the key to worthwhile and appropriate television viewing for their children.

ENDNOTES

¹Lynne Schafer Gross, The New Television Technologies (Dubuque: Wm. C. Brown, 1986), p. 6, 7.

²Steve Behrens, "A Finer Grind From The Ratings Mill," Channels 1988 Field Guide, vol. 7, no. 11, Dec. 1987, p. 12.

³Gross, p. 6.

⁴Ray Eldon Hiebert, Donald F. Ungurait, and Thomas W. Bohn, Mass Media IV (New York: Longman Inc., 1985), p. 252, 253.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Behrens, Steve. "A Finer Grind From The Ratings Mill." Channels 1988 Field Guide, vol. 7, no. 11, Dec. 1987, p. 10-16.
- Bower, Robert T. The Changing Television Audience In America. New York: Columbia University Press 1985.
- Cassata, Mary, Molefi K. Asante. Mass Communication Principles and Practices. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1979.
- Comstock, George. Television In America. Beverly Hills Sage Publications, 1980.
- "Controlling Kids' TV Habits Important." The Daily Oklahoman, 10 Dec. 1987, p. 13, cols. 1-4.
- Cross, Donna Woolfolk. Media Speak - How Television Makes Up Your Mind New York: New American Library, 1984.
- Dorr, Aimee and Peter Kovaric. "Some of the People Some of the Time--But Which People?" ed. E. L. Palmer and A. Dorr. Children And The Faces Of Television: Teaching, Violence, Selling, New York: Academic Press, 1980.
- F. Earle Barcus. Images of Life On Children's Television. New York: Praeger Publishers, 1983.
- Gross, Lynne Schafer. The New Television Technologies. Dubuque: Wm. C. Brown, 1986.
- Hiebert, Ray E., Donald F. Ungurait, and Thomas W. Bohn. Mass Media IV. New York: Longman Inc., 1985.
- Himmelweit, Hilde, A. N. Oppenheim, and Pamela Vince. Television And The Child. London: Oxford University Press, 1958.
- Howe, Dr. Leland W., and Dr. Bernard Soloman. How To Raise Children In A TV World. New york: Hart Publishing Company, 1979.
- Irwin, John. "Television Temperance." Edmond Sun, 5 March 1989, Section B, p. 1, cols. 1-6.

- Kaye, Evelyn. The Family Guide To Children's Television. New York: Pantheon Books, 1974.
- Kerlinger, Fred. Foundations of Behavioral Research. 3rd ed. New York: CBS College Publishing, 1986.
- Liebert, Robert, Joyce N. Sprafkin, and Emily S. Davidson. Effects Of Television On Children And Youth. New York: Pergamon Press, 1982.
- McNeal, James. Children As Consumers. Lexington: D.C. Heath and Company, 1987. Miller, Russell. "The 6:00 News - How Children View World Events." CTW Sesame Street Magazine Parents' Guide. March 1989, p. 12-14.
- Moody, Kate. Growing Up On Television - The TV Effect. New York: Times Books, 1980.
- Ploghoft, Milton E., James A. Anderson. Education For The Television Age. Athens: The Cooperative Center For Social Science Education, 1981.
- Quarforth, Joanne M. "Children's Understanding of the Nature of Television Characters." Journal of Communication, Summer 1979, p. 210-218.
- Schramm, Wilbur, Jack Lyle, and Edwin B. Parker. Television In The Lives Of Our Children. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1961.
- Wartella, Ellen. "The Child As A Viewer." Education For The Television Age. Ed. Milton E. Ploghoft and James A. Anderson. Athens: The Cooperative Center For Social Sciences, 1981.
- Winnick, Mariann, Charles Winick. The Television Experience - What Children See. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, Inc., 1979.

APPENDIX

COVER LETTER AND SURVEY

Dear Parent,

March 27, 1989

My name is Gary Hurst. I am a graduate student at Oklahoma State University and this survey is a part of my course work. I am interested in learning more about the role of parents in relation to their child's television viewing.

I need your help to complete this project. The following statements were given by other parents as reasons they allow their children to watch television. This survey is designed to have you agree or disagree with each item. Please take a few minutes to mark your impressions. Please return the survey to your child's teacher. Note that your identity will not be revealed to anyone. Your child's teacher will keep track of which students bring back their survey. No other record will be kept of who filled out the survey. If you have questions or concerns please contact me at 3101 Eagle Pass Lane, Edmond, Oklahoma 73013. I can be reached by phone at 478-4677. Please return by April 5, 1989.

Sincerely,

Gary J. Hurst

Please Answer for your:

Second Grader _____

Sixth Grader _____

Make your judgments on what the statements mean to YOU. Include watching video tapes as television viewing. Do not look back and forth through the items. Make each item a separate and independent judgment. Work at fairly high speed. It is your first impressions that I want you to record. Return the survey as soon as possible to your child's teacher.

1. My child learns about other parts of the world by watching television.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

2. Watching television is not a good family activity.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

3. Viewing television at home provides me with the opportunity to select programs which I feel are appropriate for my child.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

4. Television keeps my child occupied so I'm free to do other tasks.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

5. Television helps keep my child at home so I can know where he/she is.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

6. I do not use television as a reward for good behavior for my child.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

7. Television is low cost entertainment for my child.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

8. I like for my child to watch television because he/she enjoys it.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

9. Television helps my child to learn.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

10. Television teaches my child to work out his/her own problems.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

11. A child who does not watch television is a misfit among his/her peers.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

12. Television is not an appropriate pastime for children.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

13. Television watching is a difficult habit for children to break.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

14. Television programs provide a basis for family discussion.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

How do you feel most other parents would respond to the following?

15. I sometimes take away television privileges for discipline purposes.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

16. Television is sometimes used as a babysitter.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

17. It is important for parents to control the amount of time children watch television.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

18. It is important for parents to control the kinds of programs children watch.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

- A. Is the child who brought home this survey a boy _____ or girl _____?

- B. Who filled out this survey? father _____ mother _____

- C. Are you a single parent? yes _____ no _____

- D. How many children are in your family? _____

- E. Do you work outside the home? yes _____ no _____

- F. Annual household Income:

Below \$10,000	\$10,000-\$30,000	\$30,000-\$50,000	Above \$50,000
_____	_____	_____	_____

THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELP WITH THIS PROJECT. ANY ADDITIONAL COMMENTS WILL BE APPRECIATED.

VITA

Gary J. Hurst

Candidate for the Degree of
Master of Science

Thesis: CHILDREN AND TELEVISION: A PARENTAL SURVEY OF
ATTITUDES, MOTIVATION, AND CONTROL OF CHILDREN'S
TELEVISION

Major Field: Mass Communication

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born in Wichita, Kansas, June 3, 1955,
the son of William C. and JoAnn Hurst.

Education: Graduated from North High School, Wichita,
Kansas, in May 1973; received Bachelor of Arts
Degree in Mass Communication at Oklahoma Christian
College in April, 1979; Completed requirements
for the Master of Science degree at Oklahoma State
University in July, 1989.

Professional Experience: Assistant Media Center
Director, Media Center, Oklahoma Christian
College, August, 1977, to July, 1979; Media
Specialist, Learning Resource Center, Vernon
Regional Junior College, August, 1979, to August,
1981; Media Center Director, Media Center,
Oklahoma Christian College, September, 1981,
to present.