

PARENTAL CONTROL OF YOUNG CHILDREN'S
TELEVISION-VIEWING
PRACTICES

By

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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM

This research is concerned with the influence of parents on their children's television-viewing practices, both by direct and indirect control. For many years, different aspects of the extensive use of television have been subjects of much concern and investigation; nevertheless, many important questions have not yet been explored. The responsibility for selection of suitable television-viewing material is left primarily to the parents, but it is not known how extensive such control may be. The present research was designed to provide information that could be useful in answering the questions: How extensive is parental control of children's television-viewing practices? What do parents approve for children's viewing, and do parents control their children's use of television?

Need for the Study

There has been much concern over the effects on children not only of violent and unsuitable adult programs (United States Public Health Service, 1972), but also of such well-intentioned programs as Sesame Street (Ratliff, 1972). Despite all the concern, little effort has been made to relieve parents of the responsibility of controlling selection by reforming what is offered for children's viewing. Children seem to have definite preferences (Bogart, 1958), but it is possible that they

may learn to like whatever is offered. In England, Himmelweit (1958) found that, when only one channel was available, children still chose to watch something even if none of the programs were the type the children preferred. She reported, also,

What proved much more important was parental example, and to a lesser extent, parental control. In homes where the parents themselves were selective and moderate viewers, the children also tended to view relatively little (1958).

Another indication of the importance of the parents' example comes from Schramm (1963), who found that school-age children were much more likely to watch programs on the public television stations if their parents did so. In New England, Maccoby (1954) found that children's use of television to handle frustration depended on social class; she felt that this might ultimately be traced to differences in their parents' viewing habits. All of these findings indicate that parents' habits may be important factors in shaping children's television-viewing habits.

In discussing deliberate controls, rather than influence of children's television use, such control as exists is left primarily to the parents. Shayon (1951, p. 45), in writing to parents, said, "It is all so simple--and, of course, it relieves everyone but yourself of any responsibility." Yet, the industry can never relieve parents entirely of the responsibility for control. Donner (1967), in his editorial comments on the proceedings of the Texas-Stanford seminar on commercial television, makes it clear that television cannot be changed to meet the needs of any one group at the expense of other segments of the population. Steiner (1963, p. 106) stated:

As a result, the family watches together, and parents feel uneasy when the objectionable themes arise--whether in The Untouchables or Medea, King Kong or King Lear. The issue clearly surpasses quality level; it is inherent in the

inevitable difference between what interests adults and what is suitable for children. There can be a few happy blends-- as in family situation comedies or sophisticated cartoons-- but it is doubtful whether the bulk of programming can or should satisfy both sets of demands simultaneously.

Since more television will be offered than the child can use, the influences and controls that shape his use of what is offered depend on the parents. There have been studies done by Usher (1955), Himmelweit (1958), Blood (1961), Bilski (1955) and Steiner (1963) to explore parental control, but all of these researchers obtained data for their studies more than 15 years ago. It seems possible that a generation of parents who, themselves, grew up watching television, may have quite different attitudes toward controlling children's use of television than did the parents questioned by earlier researchers. Most of the respondents in the earlier studies were parents of school-age children; it is also possible that different controls would be considered suitable for children of different ages. The present study will be concerned with determining the extent of such controls for children aged three to five. The information will be useful not only to parents, but to all persons concerned with the problems of effective child guidance and the use of television in our society.

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was twofold: (1) to determine what parents prefer that their children watch and (2) to determine what controls or guidance parents use to influence children's viewing.

Definitions

Direct control refers to specific, deliberate efforts parents make

to influence their children's viewing. Examples are (1) a rule limiting the amount of time spent viewing, (2) suggesting that the child watch a particular program, (3) turning off a program that is not approved, or (4) re-directing the child.

Indirect control refers to the influence of the parents' viewing habits and the general environment that the parents provide for the child. Examples are (1) watching the same program the child does, (2) being moderate and selective in his own viewing, or (3) providing other activities for the child, but not deliberately reminding him that other activities are available.

Public television and educational television both refer to the programs that are available on channel 13 in central Oklahoma. While they are popularly referred to as educational television, such programs may or may not have specific educational goals and purposes. These programs are paid for either by private grants or by public funds.

Commercial television refers to the programs that are available on channels 4, 5, and 9 in central Oklahoma. These programs are paid for by the sale of advertising time.

CHAPTER II

RELATED LITERATURE

Children's Television Programming

Children's television programming has not remained constant over the years any more than has programming for adults. Most of the programs that were popular when Witty (1963), Usher (1955), and Steiner (1963) did their surveys have disappeared and have been replaced by new favorites. The three best-known children's programs of the late 1940's were Howdy Doody, Kukla, Fran, and Ollie, and Mr. I Magination (Settel, 1969). Howdy Doody, the most popular, lasted over a decade before it was retired as Mr. I Magination had been earlier. Kukla, Fran, and Ollie is occasionally still seen as a special program or in syndication.

The most popular children's programs of the 1950's were Disneyland, Captain Kangaroo, Lassie, and The Mickey Mouse Club (Settel, 1969). Lassie is still seen in some areas as a syndicated program. Disneyland has changed names and has changed networks, but is still on the air. Since Walt Disney's death, the format has also changed somewhat. Captain Kangaroo is still being broadcast with very few changes from the original program. It is still quite popular and is believed by many people to be one of the best children's programs available (Sarson, 1970).

In the late 1960's and early 1970's, a group of children's programs

premiered on educational television, including Sesame Street and Misterogers' Neighborhood. These were meant to provide a high-quality alternative to the children's programming available on commercial television. Rogers (1970) and Cooney (1970) have discussed openly the goals and purposes of their programs. Sesame Street has been quite controversial, perhaps because of its more ambitious goals. Ratliff (1972) has criticized the program because some of its puppet and slapstick sequences employ the same types of ritual violence that have been considered objectionable in commercial programming. Sprigle (1971) has shown that, despite its educational objectives, Sesame Street cannot take the place of other needed educational programs for preschoolers.

Since only the most noteworthy of national children's programs have been mentioned above and since many family programs have been specifically designed to appeal to children, there is a wide variety of programming available for children. In addition, there are innumerable locally produced children's programs, many of which are excellent. These are discussed in detail by Garry (1962). Elsewhere, Garry (1969) provides valuable suggestions for producing worthwhile children's television programs; his suggestions are also helpful to people who are trying to choose wisely from the numerous children's programs offered.

Time Spent Viewing Television by Preschoolers

Compared to older children, less is known about preschoolers' viewing practices because of the difficulty of interviewing them and the consequent necessity of depending on their parents' estimates of viewing time and preferences. Nevertheless, many opinions and some research data are available on the practices of the youngest audience. Joan

Ganz Cooney (1970), originator of the popular children's program Sesame Street, reported that most children have watched television for over four thousand hours before starting school. Estimates of the time spent watching television each week vary widely for this age group. According to the Nielson statistics, cited by Federal Communications Chairman Dean Burch (1970), children aged two to five are the heaviest viewers of television, watching more than 28 hours a week. Bogart (1958, p. 249) says, ". . . (according to their mothers) young children aged 3-6 watched TV 8 hours on Monday through Friday." Educator S. I. Hayakawa (1973) reports statistics showing that preschool children watch television over 54 hours a week.

Despite the differences, the research does show that very young children watch television regularly; other research is concerned with how these children watch television and what they choose to watch. Many sources indicate that younger children are more absorbed in television and more impressed by it than are older children and adults. Television and Growing Up: The Impact of Televised Violence (United States Public Health Service, 1972) reports that preschoolers are unable to divide their attention between television and other activities as older people do. The special influence that television has on children who are too young to read is mentioned by two authors. Himmelweit (1958) found that television was a real advantage in acquiring general knowledge for children too young to read. David Potter (Donner, 1967), at a seminar conducted by the University of Texas, said:

. . . television reaches millions of viewers who have no access to the printed page, and these viewers are at an especially formative stage in their lives for they are children who are too young to read (p. 53).

There is disagreement, however, over whether the younger children can watch a whole story. Himmelweit (1958) reports that young children are more impressed by particular incidents than by whole stories. On the other hand, Bogart (1958) reported that by age three a child can watch television for a half hour at a time and can follow the plot and sequence of a story.

From the research, evidence indicates that young children have definite preferences among story and program types. Bogart (1958) points out that the three-year-old has strong program preferences. He also cites statistics that show that the most popular shows among these children are westerns and children's shows, although many children are also beginning to watch adult comedy shows. Himmelweit (1958) reported that young children like action and clear-cut characterization, because they have difficulty understanding implied motives. She also found that young children preferred westerns, although some of the youngest were frightened by them. It is evident from all of these sources that young children watch television enough to need some guidance.

Parental Influence on Television- Viewing Patterns

There is some evidence that parents have a considerable influence on children's viewing patterns in ways more subtle than their direct efforts at control. The findings reflect the fact that parents are the primary determiners of the child's environment. They set the style of living as well as their own style of interacting with their child. Maccoby (1954) indicated that differences in the social class of the parents determined the differences in television-viewing behavior that

she found among the children in her sample. Blood (1961) found that parental practices for controlling children watching television varied significantly according to the parents' social class.

Schramm (1961) found that children were much more likely to watch adult crime and western programs if their parents watched them. It is not clear whether this effect is due to family viewing being preferred or to the children's desire to imitate their parents. The effect holds for more suitable programs. Schramm (1963) found, also, that children were more likely to watch educational television if their parents did. Himmelweit (Arons, 1963) found that parents do little guiding in taste development, tending to forbid programs rather than encourage better ones. Elsewhere, she indicates the possible importance of indirect guidance by example (Himmelweit, 1958). She found, in her survey in England, that parental example was more important than social class in determining children's tastes. Schramm (1961, p. 47) sums up the probability of such parental influence when he says, "During a child's first ten years, the family is the chief influence on the shaping of the child's taste."

Guidance Problems Related to Television

Over the past twenty-five years, television has become firmly established in most American homes. While many people disagree over the good and bad aspects of this phenomenon, it is generally accepted that the widespread use of television has created some problems. Most of these problems involve family life, and one of the most common is discipline of children in their use of television. There are specific difficulties in several areas of child guidance, such as: bedtimes and

mealtimes, what programs to watch, how much time to spend watching, homework and chores, advertising, imitation of behavior seen on television, and general aggression caused by watching violent programs. Unusual or uncontrollable problems in any of these areas probably indicate existing difficulties in family relationships. Himmelweit (1958, p. 25) writes:

But in many cases this conflict is only indirectly due to television; it may arise from existing poor parent-child relations, from unwise handling of problems thrown up by television, or from emotional disturbances within the child.

To parents having discipline problems with television, Shayon (1951, p. 48) suggests, "Take a look at your homes to see whether they are democracies or dictatorships, benevolent or otherwise." Nonetheless, most parents agree on the occasional need for some kind of regulation, guidance, or discipline related to television usage. Steiner (1963) found that half of the parents he questioned replied that they at least tried to maintain some rules regarding their children's use of television.

Bedtimes and Mealtimes

Bedtimes and mealtimes seem to be the areas of discipline most often singled out for special mention as related to television. Himmelweit (1958, p. 25) reported, "Conflict does occur, especially over bedtimes, mealtimes, and the banning of certain programmes." Usher (1955, p. 176) found that "After the advent of TV, mealtimes and bedtimes became trouble periods for most of the families in the survey." Steiner (1963) found that many parents spontaneously mentioned problems with bedtimes and mealtimes in response to an open-ended question about the disadvantages of television. Blood (1961) found that the average mother

in his survey was asked twice a week for permission to stay up past the usual bedtime to watch television. Weathers (1954) reported that children in Indiana were watching television programs late enough to cause difficulty with bedtime, but he did not include any data on the regular bedtimes of the children before the inclusion of television in their homes. It would seem that most children resist leaving the television to eat or go to bed; however, these surveys were done when television was still relatively new in most American homes. More research needs to be done to learn if parents are still experiencing the same problems.

In addition to identifying problems, Usher (1955) also asked parents how they dealt with such problems. On mealtimes, a third of the parents reported that their families ate while watching television, while the majority reported that they either turned off the set at mealtimes or ate in an area of the house where television was not available. Most of the parents she surveyed solved the bedtime problem simply by enforcing a rule that the child must leave the television and go to bed at his regular bedtime. Some parents reported that they turned off the television at the child's bedtime, but a few parents said that they allowed the child to watch as long as he liked. Steiner (1963) did not ask about the specific rules parents used, but he reports that many parents voluntarily mentioned that their children were not allowed to watch later than bedtime. A few of them mentioned that their children must eat before watching television or that television was a reward for eating. In Blood's study (1961), one-third of the parents in all social classes reported that they granted no exceptions to the child's regular bedtime. Other parents granted exceptions for special programs, weekends, favorite programs, or other reasons. Only in the lower-lower

class did substantial numbers of parents report either that the children had no regular bedtime or that they were allowed to watch television later than bedtime whenever they wanted.

What Programs Should Be Watched

The problem of what programs should be watched involves two different aspects: what to do when different members of the family want to watch different programs and what to do when children want to watch a program that the parents feel is unsuitable. Bogart (1958, p. 246) mentions both these problems when he says:

Television becomes a point of conflict between parents and children not only when they want to watch different shows at the same time, but also as parents attempt to enforce their views of what the children should and should not be viewing.

The parents in Usher's survey (1955) reported both of these problems. Forty per cent of them said that they disapproved of some of the programs their children wanted to watch. Bickering among children who wanted to watch different programs was most common in families where there was more than five years of age difference between the children; the problem was reported by 60 per cent of the families in that subgroup. Most parents reported that there was no problem with parents and children wanting to watch different programs. Steiner (1963) found that over half of his sample worried about children seeing unsuitable material. Most of these people mentioned violent programs as a particular worry, but a few mentioned such things as sex, smoking, drinking, and general adult themes. Witty (1963) reported that half of the school children he questioned said that their parents sometimes helped them choose suitable television programs. Blood (1961) found that most of

the parents he interviewed said that they controlled the types of programs their children watched, with the percentages ranging from 52 per cent of the parents in the lower-lower class to 74 per cent of the parents in the upper-middle class. He also found problems of children wanting to watch different programs, ranging from two conflicts a week in families where the children's ages were close to almost four conflicts a week in families where the ages of the children were more diverse. Bilski (1955) found that 41 per cent of the parents in his survey said that they tried to supervise the types of programs their children watched and Himmelweit (1958) reported that only a third of the parents she interviewed attempted such supervision. An interesting corollary to the problem of what to watch is that one fourth of the parents surveyed by Usher (1955) stated that they insisted the children watch certain programs the parents felt were especially worthy. Bilski (1955) also found that many of the parents in his sample encouraged or insisted on the watching of certain programs.

Among the families in Usher's survey (1955), conflicts between children were solved in a variety of ways by different families. A few of the families had two television sets. Many parents either made the children compromise on a program they both liked or the children took turns deciding on a program. Some parents allowed the younger child to choose the program in the early part of the evening, and allowed the older child to choose the programs in the later part of the evening, but some parents always allowed the older child to decide. Among parents who wanted to watch different programs from their children, most said that they sometimes decided and sometimes let their children decide; in one third of the families the parents always prevailed, and in one tenth

of the families the children always prevailed. In Blood's survey (1961), taking turns was the most commonly reported solution for all types of family conflict over television.

Most of the parents in Usher's survey (1955) insisted that they tried to limit their children's viewing to suitable programs and that their children usually obeyed. Most of the parents in Blood's sample (1961) controlled their children's viewing. Turning off an objectionable program was the most common procedure in all social classes. Verbal commands were widely used only in the lower-lower class, while distraction was widely used in the upper-lower, lower-middle, and upper-middle classes. On the other hand, Steiner (1963) found that only ten per cent of his sample made any specific effort to discourage the watching of shows they considered unsuitable.

Limiting Time Spent Viewing

The time children spend watching television is a matter of some controversy. Himmelweit (1958, p. 12) says, "Viewing seemed to become a habit on which the child fell back when nothing more interesting was available." Schramm (1961) found that children made time for television by leaving out other fantasy-related activities, such as reading comic books and going to the movies. Nonetheless, parents seem to be concerned about this aspect of television watching. In Usher's survey (1955), the most common complaint about television was that it was too time-consuming. Over one third of Steiner's (1963) respondents felt that television took too much time needed for other activities, but only two per cent said that they had any rules limiting the total time spent viewing. Witty (1963) interviewed school children and found that

slightly over half of them said that their parents imposed some limit on the amount of time they could spend watching television. In Bilski's survey (1955), 71 per cent of the parents restricted the amount of time their children spent viewing, but of the remaining parents, many felt that the children spent too much time watching television, even though as parents, they did nothing about it. Blood (1961) found that only lower-class children had unrestricted viewing time. One third of the parents he questioned felt that television took up too much time needed for other activities.

Homework and Chores

While many parents felt that television took up time needed for active play or socializing, interference with homework and chores was the most common complaint in the time-consuming category. Almost one fifth of Steiner's respondents (1963) mentioned interference with homework as one of the main disadvantages of television. A mother in Usher's survey (1955) insisted, "It leads to procrastination on various family chores and allows less time for reading." While Blood (1961) did not ask what activities were neglected in favor of television, some parents voluntarily mentioned homework and chores. In Bilski's study (1955), homework and chores were each mentioned by over one fourth of the parents. Methods of coping with these problems were discussed only in Steiner's study (1963); fewer than ten per cent of the respondents said that they had rules to handle the problem of homework and chores. For those parents who did have such rules, the standard application was either that homework and chores must be done first or that television was used as a reward for the performance of homework and chores.

Despite all the concern over homework, Greenstein (1954) was unable to find any difference in the grades of elementary school children who had television at home and those who did not.

Advertising

Another problem, advertising, is one that has been receiving considerable attention lately. Television advertising has certainly changed since Dr. Frances Horwich of Ding Dong School was censured for promoting commercial vitamin tablets (Packard, 1957). Today, candy-coated vitamin tablets are advertised routinely on children's television, along with a host of other products. The television industry points out defensively that only 24 per cent of daytime television and 13 per cent of prime time television is commercials compared with 50 per cent of the space in consumer magazines (Donner, 1967). However, most children are too young to read those magazines, but they do watch television. Moreover, the consumer organization, Action for Children's Television, has found that the percentage of commercials on children's television runs much higher than the industry average; on one occasion, their researchers found that an entire 45-minute segment of Romper Room was spent promoting commercial products (Sarson, 1970). In 1970, this group organized a widespread campaign of parents writing to the Federal Communications Commission about their problems with children's television; advertising became the central focus of the campaign. Gussow (1973) believes that the television advertising of food products has become a major contributor to the nutritional inadequacies plaguing the United States. She discovered that during the Saturday morning cartoons, children were exposed to 22 commercials an hour, over three fourths of which

were for edible products. She commented:

These products overwhelmingly consisted of sugared cereals (some containing pink and purple marshmallows); pastry products, cookies, candy, and other sweet or salty snacks; and various sweetened beverages (p. 7).

For parents, the effect is one of children constantly wanting the new products they have seen on television. Glick and Levy (1962) found that many people thought that children were particularly receptive to commercials and were concerned about the effects of commercials on children. Before the current surge of concern in this area, Steiner (1963) found that one per cent of his sample mentioned having discipline problems caused by television advertising. Even earlier, Packard (1957) speculated about the possible ill effects on children of so much television advertising.

Imitating Behavior Seen on Television

Children imitating behavior they have seen on television is seen by parents as having both good and bad aspects. While children often imitate the good moral example set by Lassie, they also imitate the actions of less worthy characters. In Steiner's study (1963), over 25 per cent of the respondents were able to think of an actual case in which a child had benefited from television, but over 20 per cent were able to think of an instance in which a child had been harmed or had done something harmful as a result of television. Ten per cent were worried about children picking up the bad influence they saw on television. Wolf (1973) found that children were more likely to obey or disobey an arbitrary rule according to what was done by a child on the television they were watching. Usher (1955) did not ask specifically

about imitation of behaviors, but she did ask about the influence of television on moral standards. Twenty-three per cent felt that television had a beneficial effect in this area, while only three per cent felt that it had a deleterious effect. None of these studies discussed any means of coping with children's imitation of what they saw on television.

Effects of Television Violence on Children

To a certain extent, the problem of aggression influenced by violent television programs is a sub-class of the problem of imitation. Since aggression has received so much attention, it should be discussed separately. In addition to the possibility of children imitating aggressive behavior seen on television, there is the possibility that violent television programs induce aggression by creating a general state of arousal. Yet, there is the considerable disagreement among researchers investigating the problem as to whether the effect is genuine. Bandura (1963) first demonstrated an effect by watching children's aggressive acts with dolls. Liebert and Baron (1972) attempted to show that the children would also act more aggressively toward humans by allowing them to push buttons on a contraption that the children were told would hurt another child. On the other hand, Feshbach (1971) found no significant differences in aggression between boys who had watched violent television programs and boys who had watched nonviolent television programs. It is worth noting that the first two studies were done under highly artificial laboratory conditions, while Feshbach's study on boys living in boarding schools attempted to preserve as natural and realistic a situation as

possible. The Surgeon General of the United States heard testimony from numerous researchers on the subject, but found the results to be inconclusive. Whatever the results of the experimental work indicate, parents are concerned about the effect of violent television programs. As was mentioned in a previous paragraph, 40 per cent of Steiner's (1963) sample were concerned about children watching violent television programs, but only ten per cent attempted to prevent the children from doing so. In Usher's survey (1955), most of the parents were concerned about violent programs and said that they limited their children's viewing of such programs.

In summary, the literature revealed several areas of investigation that need more study. The influence of social class and general environment on children's television-viewing habits is an interesting problem, but it is beyond the scope of the present study. The influence of parental habits may be as significant a factor in controlling children's use of television as is deliberate control. There is considerable variation in parents' efforts to guide and control their children's use of television. Earlier research did not reveal any clear trends; in addition, it is possible that attitudes and practices have changed in the fifteen years since the earlier studies were done. The literature also revealed several areas of child guidance that merit further investigation in any study of parental control of children's television-viewing habits. Among these are bedtimes and mealtimes, what programs to watch, how much time to spend watching, homework and chores, advertising, and imitation of behavior seen on television.

CHAPTER III

PROCEDURE

To achieve the purpose of this study, the following steps were taken: (1) development of a telephone interview-questionnaire, (2) selection of subjects, and (3) administration of the telephone interview-questionnaire.

Development of the Telephone Interview-Questionnaire

An instrument was developed to obtain the desired information since none was available for this purpose. While a questionnaire involves the problem of people giving answers they believe to be socially acceptable, it is nevertheless the method most often used to obtain such information. Blood (1961), Usher (1955), and Steiner (1963) all used questionnaires to obtain data concerning parents' controls of television; they used different methods to administer their questionnaires. A questionnaire seemed to be the most feasible method of determining television-viewing practices; any method of attempted observation of viewing practices would involve similar problems of behavior being altered to be socially acceptable while being observed.

The possibility of mailing the questionnaire as the method of administration was eliminated because of the cost of printing and mailing the questionnaire as well as the anticipation of limited returns.

Administering the questionnaire as a personal interview was also eliminated because of the cost of transportation and the extra time needed for traveling. Thus, a questionnaire that could be administered as a telephone interview was developed as the most feasible method for gathering the data. The questionnaire was developed to obtain information relevant to the purposes of the study. Items were included to cover the discipline problems related to television as revealed in the review of the literature. The questionnaire was then examined by two persons familiar with research. Following the procedures described in the following sections on sampling and administration, the investigator administered the questionnaire by telephone to a trial sample of nine people. At the end of the interview, each person was asked if all the questions seemed clear and easily understood. The responses were then evaluated to determine if revisions were needed in the questionnaire.

All of the respondents in the trial sample stated that the questions seemed clear and easily understood. However, their answers indicated that there was some confusion over the question "Do you watch channel 13?" Most of the respondents interpreted that question as referring to their children. Since another question asked for that information about the children, the first question was amended to read "Do the adults in your family watch channel 13?"

A suggestion had been made that, in asking to what extent television interfered with family routines, the investigator should ask the respondents to specify "often," "sometimes," or "never." This proved to be unworkable in a telephone interview as it necessitated several extra questions and prolonged the interview beyond a reasonable length of time. Questions that could be answered "yes" or "no" were substituted.

The trial sample also revealed the need for a consistent policy to handle cases in which the line was busy or the parents were not at home, but someone else had answered the telephone. Because of the complicated record-keeping involved in continuing to call a number until a response was obtained, the investigator decided to call each number once. Exceptions were those cases in which a parent was at home, but requested that the investigator call again at a more convenient time.

Selection of Subjects

Enid is a community of approximately 45,000 people in north central Oklahoma. The trial sample was selected by taking every hundredth name in the Enid telephone directory, unless that name was a business, in which case it was eliminated and the next name in the directory was used. One hundred and eighty-nine people were telephoned for the trial sample. Of these, 70 did not answer and 94 did not have children the age being studied. Nine numbers were out of order or disconnected since the directory had been published. Seven numbers were answered, but the parents were not at home, and three numbers were busy. One person did not want to participate. Nine people did participate, of whom seven were mothers and two were fathers.

The final sample for the study was selected by taking every twenty-fifth name in the Enid telephone directory, eliminating businesses and those who had been telephoned for the trial sample. Seven hundred and seventy-seven people were telephoned for the final sample, of whom 366 did not have children the age being studied. There was no answer for 300 of the numbers and 29 were out of order or had been disconnected since the directory was published. Forty-eight numbers were busy and in

nine homes, the parents were not at home. Five people did not want to participate. Of the thirty people who did participate, 26 were mothers and four were fathers.

Administration of the Interview-Questionnaire

Each person telephoned was asked if he had a child between the ages of three and five and if he would be willing to participate in the survey. If the answer was yes, he was asked the remaining questions. As the person responded, his answers were recorded. The interview schedule may be found in Appendix A.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

Data are presented by frequency and percentage in tables. Since no major changes were made after the trial test, the data from the trial sample were included in the final sample, making a total of 39 subjects.

Television-Viewing Practices

Table I presents data related to general television-viewing practices. Twenty families owned more than one television. Fourteen families owned two sets, five families owned three sets, and one family owned seven sets. Whether or not the family owns more than one set, most families watch television together. Only six respondents stated that their children usually watched television alone. Seventeen people reported that their children usually watched with other children; many of these people specified that the children watched with siblings. Eight respondents stated that their children usually watched television with the parents. Eight people were unable to specify which pattern was most common for their child.

Thirty-four respondents reported that the adults in their families watch channel 13. Of these, seven watch it less often than once a week. Nine people reported that the adults in their families watch channel 13 from one to four times a week. Eighteen respondents stated that they watch channel 13 every day. Most of the respondents in each category

TABLE I
 FAMILY TELEVISION-VIEWING PRACTICES
 N=39

Question	Frequency	Percentage
Number of televisions owned		
one	19	48
two	14	36
three	5	13
seven	1	3
Children watch		
alone	6	15
other children	17	43
parents	8	21
mixture of above	8	21
Adults watch channel 13		
yes	34	87
no	5	13
Adults watch channel 13		
less than 1 a week	7	18
1-4 times a week	9	23
every day	18	46
Children watch channel 13		
yes	37	95
no	2	5
Children watch channel 13		
every day	34	87
less often	3	8
Disagree about programs		
yes	33	85
no	6	15
How decided		
"just decide"	9	23
watch other TV	12	30
father chooses evening	7	18
except specials	3	8
vote	3	8
take turns	2	5
child decides	1	3

indicated by their remarks that they watch Sesame Street with their children. Thus, the investigator was unable to determine if the parents ever watched adult programs on channel 13. Only two children did not watch channel 13. Thirty-seven children did watch it; 34 of them watch it every day and three watch regularly, but less often than every day. The data did not support the assumption that children follow their parents' example in this respect, but the data did indicate the possibility that parents follow their children's example, first watching Sesame Street and later sampling the adult public television programs.

Thirty-three per cent of the families in the study have occasional disagreements over what programs to watch. Only six people reported that they did not have such disagreements in their families. The disputes were settled in a variety of ways. Nine respondents were unable to describe clearly their method of settling disagreements. The most common response to this problem in those families that own more than one set is for one person in the family to watch another television. Twelve respondents stated that they used this solution for disagreements. The third common response is that the father chooses the programs when he is at home. Seven families follow this practice, although three of them make exceptions when a good special is presented. Other methods of settling disputes that were mentioned include voting, always letting the child decide, and taking turns.

Television-Viewing Time

Table II reveals that most of the families in the survey did not place any limits on the amount of time their children could spend watching television. Many of the parents who did not have such rules

TABLE II
 CHILDREN'S TELEVISION-VIEWING TIME AS REPORTED BY PARENTS
 N=39

Question	Frequency	Percentage
Limit amount of time		
yes	11	28
no	28	72
Rule used		
channel 13 + 1 hr.	3	8
3 hr. a day	3	8
2 hr. a day	1	3
not during day	1	3
short time before supper	1	3
daytime + 2 hr. evening	1	3
parents select programs	1	3
How enforced		
no trouble	4	10
turn off TV	5	13
find other activities	2	5

qualified their answers, saying that the preschoolers did not watch enough to be a problem. Eleven families had rules limiting the amount of time their children were allowed to watch television. Three of these families allowed their children to watch the children's programs in the mornings on channel 13 and one hour in the afternoon or evening. Three other parents stated that their children could not watch more than three hours a day. Other guidelines that were mentioned include watching two hours a day, watching a short time before supper, and the parents selecting the programs to be watched. When asked how these rules were enforced, four of the respondents stated that they have no trouble with enforcement. Five parents reported that they turn off the television and two parents reported that they try to interest the children in other activities.

Parental Preferences

Parents' preferences regarding the programs their children watch are presented in Table III. Thirty parents reported that they did not want their children to watch some of the programs on the air; however, three of these parents were unable to specify which programs or types of programs they disapproved. In general, the parents disapproved of programs with adult themes, including soap operas, some movies, and some variety shows, and programs depicting violence, crime, horror, or suspense. One mother did not want her child to see a program about an unhappy adopted child, because of personal circumstances. Another mother objected to the popular children's program, Electric Company, because of the use of slang and the portrayal of an interracial marriage.

TABLE III
 PARENTS' APPROVAL AND DISAPPROVAL OF PROGRAMS
 N=39

Question	Frequency	Percentage
Disapprove some programs		
yes	30	77
no	9	23
What programs		
violent programs	9	23
crime shows	6	15
thrillers, horror, suspense	7	18
scary shows	4	10
some movies	5	13
movies about sex	3	8
soap operas	2	5
evening programs	3	8
movies with bad language	1	3
some variety shows	1	3
science fiction	1	3
<u>Electric Company</u>	1	3
about unhappy adoption	1	3
don't know	3	8
Child wants to watch		
yes	17	42
no	13	33
How it is handled		
turn on something else	6	15
provide other activities	2	5
tell him he can't	2	5
let him watch	2	5
other TV	1	3
turn off set	1	3
explain why not	1	3
don't let him	1	3
watch when child not there	1	3
Parent watches		
yes	18	46
no	12	30
Why disapproved		
violence	11	28
sexual connotations	4	10
poor taste, don't like	4	10
nightmares	3	8
disturbs children	3	8

TABLE III (Continued)

Question	Frequency	Percentage
Why disapproved (continued)		
gory, frightening	3	8
they learn what they see	3	8
too outspoken	1	3
not family entertainment	1	3
slang and interracial marriage	1	3
personal circumstances	1	3
Encourage some programs		
yes	34	87
no	5	13
What programs		
<u>Sesame Street</u>	17	42
specials	12	30
channel 13	9	23
educational programs	7	18
<u>Misterogers Neighborhood</u>	6	15
<u>Electric Company</u>	5	13
Walt Disney programs	5	13
Jacques Cousteau	3	8
<u>Peanuts specials</u>	3	8
animal programs	3	8
<u>Captain Kangaroo</u>	2	5
family programs	2	5
<u>The Waltons</u>	2	5
<u>Apple's Way</u>	1	3
<u>The Brady Bunch</u>	1	3
<u>The Partridge Family</u>	1	3
Dr. Seuss programs	1	3
sports	1	3
<u>National Geographic specials</u>	1	3
cartoons	1	3
panel shows	1	3
<u>Bible stories</u>	1	3
<u>Who's Afraid of Opera</u>	1	3
Method of encouragement		
remind the child	15	38
turn it on	8	21
not needed	7	18
adult watches	3	8
adult comments	2	5
invite friends	1	3
"sit him down there"	1	3

TABLE III (Continued)

Question	Frequency	Percentage
Reason for encouragement		
educational	22	56
good entertainment, wholesome	6	15
morals, good family life	3	8
nature, beauty	3	8
interesting	2	5
few children in neighborhood	1	3

Seventeen of the parents stated that their children occasionally want to watch the disapproved programs. Six of the parents turn the television to something else; this was the most common method of dealing with the problem. Two parents reported that they let the child watch the program despite their disapproval. Other methods of handling the problem include just telling the child he cannot watch the program, sending the child to watch another television set, finding something else for him to do, turning off the television, or explaining why he cannot watch the program.

Eighteen parents stated that they watch the programs they do not want their children to see, but some of these were not the same parents whose children wanted to watch the programs. Some of these parents also mentioned that they watched after the children were asleep. The most common objection to programs was violence, although a variety of reasons were mentioned. These are listed in Table III.

Table III also reveals that 34 parents in the survey encourage their children to watch certain programs. A large number of programs

and types of programs were mentioned; most of them are programs designed for children. Methods of encouragement are reminding the child, watching with him, inviting his friends to watch, and commenting on the program. The major reason for watching these programs was because of their educational value. Additional reasons are listed in Table III.

Television Interference With Family Routines

Table IV indicates that 19 respondents reported that television occasionally interfered with their children's bedtimes. When asked how the problem was handled, 11 of these parents reported that they make exceptions to the children's bedtimes for special programs. Five parents insisted that their children go to bed, while one parent insisted that the child go to bed if it has been a long day. Two parents indicated that they turn off the television at bedtime.

Seventeen parents stated that television occasionally interfered with their family's regularly scheduled meals. In three cases, the respondents eat dinner while watching the news, indicating that it is the adults' chosen program that interferes with the meal rather than the children's chosen program. Five other families also watch while eating, but these people did not specify what programs they watched.

Eleven families reported that television occasionally interferes with chores. In 22 families, television did not interfere with chores, while in six families, the preschoolers did not have chores. Among those people who did have a problem with chores, the methods of handling the problem included letting the child finish the program he was watching, watching television after the chores were done, turning off the television, and insisting that the child do his chores. Letting the

TABLE IV
 TELEVISION INTERFERENCE WITH FAMILY ROUTINES
 N=39

Question	Frequency	Percentage
Interferes with bedtime		
yes	19	48
no	20	51
Method of handling		
exceptions for special	11	28
insist they go to bed	5	13
turn it off	2	5
go to bed, if long day	1	3
Interfere with meals		
yes	17	42
no	22	56
Method of handling		
watch through meals	5	13
watch news over dinner	3	8
insist they go eat	3	8
turn television off	3	8
delay meal slightly	1	3
finish eating first	1	3
Interferes with chores		
yes	11	28
no	22	56
no chores	6	15
Method of handling		
let finish program	4	10
watch after chores	2	5
turn television off	2	5
insist they do chores	2	5
work during commercials	1	3

child finish the program he was watching was the most common method of handling the problem.

Influence of Television on Child's Behavior

Table V indicates that 37 respondents stated that their child wanted them to buy things he had seen on television. Most of the products mentioned were toys or breakfast cereals, although several other food and household products were mentioned. Most parents buy the products occasionally, although most of those who buy the products qualified their answers by saying that they bought the product if they thought it would be used.

Table V also shows that most of the parents stated that their children say words or imitate actions that they have learned from watching television. The parents usually approve of the words or actions that the children have imitated; many of them commented that their children only imitated the educational programs. Among the parents who did disapprove of the things their children had learned from television, the most common method of handling the problem is to attempt to explain to the child why he should not behave that way. Other parents turn off the program the children are imitating, tell them not to do that, tell them it is bad for their family to do that, or just let them know the parent disapproves.

TABLE V
 INFLUENCE OF TELEVISION ON CHILD'S BEHAVIOR
 N=39

Question	Frequency	Percentage
Wants parents to buy products advertised on television		
yes	37	95
no	2	5
What products		
toys	26	66
cereals	12	30
food	6	15
Koolaid	2	5
gum	2	5
dolls	2	5
household products	1	3
candy	1	3
soaps	1	3
detergent	1	3
baking soda	1	3
Fisher-Price toys	1	3
Jello	1	3
Breakfast Squares	1	3
Barbie dolls	1	3
Fruit Loops cereal	1	3
hobby kits	1	3
Method of handling		
buy for special occasion	10	25
if will be used	9	23
buy occasionally	7	18
noncommittal	2	5
if can afford	2	5
make individual judgements	1	3
try to explain	1	3
tell can't have everything	1	3
make excuse not to buy	1	3
tell him no	1	3
Says words learned from television viewing		
yes	31	79
no	8	21
Parental approval of imitated words		
yes	22	56
no	9	23

TABLE V (Continued)

Question	Frequency	Percentage
Method of handling		
explain	4	10
tell him not to say	2	5
tell him bad for us	2	5
let know is disapproved	1	3
Imitates actions learned from watching television		
yes	28	72
no	11	28
Parental approval of imitated actions		
yes	23	59
no	5	13
Method of handling		
try to explain	4	10
turn off program	1	3

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, FINDINGS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This investigation was concerned with the influence of parents on their children's television-viewing practices, determined both by the parents' example and by the rules the parents enforce to cope with the various problems presented by television. The purposes of the study were (1) to determine what parents prefer that their children watch and (2) to determine what controls or guidance parents use to influence children's viewing.

A telephone interview-questionnaire was designed to obtain the data. Every twenty-fifth listing in the Enid telephone directory was telephoned; from 966 contacts, 39 were fruitful. Each person was asked if he had a child between the ages of three and five and if he would be willing to participate in the survey. Those who agreed were asked the remaining items on the questionnaire (Appendix A). From 966 contacts, 39 were obtained for the sample.

Findings

The findings from this survey are as follows:

(1) Most of the children watch television with other members of their families. This allows for closer control and a greater possibility of children learning television practices from the examples set by other members of their families.

(2) Most families have occasional disagreements over what programs to watch. The most common method for settling disagreements is for one person to watch another television set.

(3) Most families do not limit the amount of time their pre-schoolers may spend watching television. Those who do limit the amount of time use a variety of rules.

(4) Most parents do not want their children to watch some of the programs being aired. The disapproved programs are usually those with adult themes or those using violence, crime, or horror in the story.

(5) Most parents encourage their children to watch some programs. Most of these programs are ones designed for children or for family viewing. Educational value is the most important attribute of these programs in the parents' view. Most parents remind the child that the program is on or turn on the television at the right time.

(6) Television interferes with family routines for many families, however, the parents did not report any consistent methods of handling these problems.

(7) The influence of commercials is a problem for most families. Few parents routinely buy whatever the child wants.

(8) The children imitate actions and words they have learned from television; however, parents reported that, in most cases, the children only imitated desirable behavior.

Recommendations

Since the sample for this study was small, it is impossible to generalize. Research to determine the most effective method of control would be helpful, as well as research on how effective are the methods

parents use for control.

While the television networks cannot provide only programs that are suitable for children, they should provide some programs that are suitable. They should also be alert to the influence their programs and their commercials have on young children. Parents must accept the major responsibility for children's television-viewing practices.

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APPENDIXES

Telephone Interview-Questionnaire

My name is Patricia McCormick. I am a graduate student at Oklahoma State University and I am conducting a survey on how parents control their children's use of television. If you have a child between the ages of three and five, would you be willing to let me ask you some questions about television?

I. Television-Viewing Practices

1. A. Do you have a television set?
B. How many?
2. When your child watches television, does he usually watch alone, with other children, or with parents?
3. A. Do the adults in your family ever watch channel 13?
B. How often?
4. A. Does your child ever watch channel 13?
B. How often?
5. A. Do different members of your family ever want to watch different programs?
B. If so, what do you do about it?

Television-Viewing Time

6. A. Do you limit the amount of time your child may spend watching television?
B. If so, what is your rule?
C. How do you enforce it?

Telephone Interview-Questionnaire (Continued)

III. Parental Preferences

7. A. Are there programs you prefer that your child not watch?
 - B. If so, what are they?
 - C. Does your child want to watch these programs?
 - D. What do you do about it when he wants to watch them?
 - E. Do you watch these programs yourself?
 - F. Why do you object to these programs?
8. A. Are there any programs that you encourage your child to watch?
 - B. If so, what are they?
 - C. How do you encourage him to watch these programs?
 - D. Why do you want him to watch these programs?

IV. Television Interference With Family Routines

9. A. Does television ever interfere with your child's bedtime?
 - B. If so, what do you do about it?
10. A. Does television ever conflict with your family's regularly scheduled meals?
 - B. If so, what do you do about it?
11. A. Does television ever interfere with your child's chores?
 - B. If so, what do you do about it?

V. Influence on Child's Behavior

12. A. Does your child ever want you to buy things he has seen on commercials such as toys or food products?

Telephone Interview-Questionnaire (Continued)

12. B. If so, what?
C. What do you do about it?
13. A. Does your child ever say words he has learned from television?
B. Do you approve of this?
C. If you disapprove, what do you do about it?
14. A. Does your child ever imitate actions he has seen on television?
B. If so, do you approve of this?
C. If you disapprove, what do you do about it?

Thank you very much for cooperating. You've been very helpful.

APPENDIX A

Recording Form

- I. 1A. yes no 1B. 2. alone children parents
 3A. yes no 3B. 4A. yes no 4B.
 5A. yes no 5B.
- II. 6A. yes no 6B.
 6C.
- III. 7A. yes no 7B.
 7C. yes no 7D.
 7E. yes no 7F.
 8A. yes no 8B.
 8C.
 8D.
- IV. 9A. yes no 9B.
 10A. yes no 10B.
 11A. yes no no chores 11B.
- V. 12A. yes no 12B.
 12C.
 13A. yes no 13B. yes no
 13C.
 14A. yes no 14B. yes no
 14C.

VITA 2

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Master of Science

Thesis: PARENTAL CONTROL OF YOUNG CHILDREN'S TELEVISION-VIEWING
PRACTICES

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