

The Influence of Teen Children's Television Viewing on Perceived Reality:
The Roles of Parental Mediation and Peer Interaction

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Abstract

This study considers multiple features of parental mediation and peer interaction regarding violent television viewing in examining their influences on teen children's perceived reality about perceived mistrust and danger. This study also examines teen children's viewing of violent and action-oriented television on their perceived reality. These relationships were proposed as a testing model. Data were collected from 184 parents-children dyads. Model testing shows that peer interaction rather than parental mediation is a compelling contributor to teen children's television viewing behavior processes, which influence the construction of social reality about real life danger. However, the direct effect of peer interaction on perceived danger is negative. Results suggest the importance of peer interaction in teen children's violent media content consumption as both a positive and negative agent. Results also demonstrate that teen children's exposure to violent television is a positive predictor of mistrust. The direct predictability of television viewing behaviors of perceived danger, a first-order cultivation effect, accounts for the systematic processing of specific occasions of media content. The effect of motivation and involvement on mistrust, a second-order cultivation effect, explains the heuristic activation of media experience.

Statement of Problem

The objective of this study is to examine the influence of parental mediation and peer interaction on teen children's motivations and attention to television, which lead to perceived reality about mistrust and danger. Following cultivation theory, which states that television viewers perceive reality similar as they view on television, this study also examines teen children's viewing of violent and action-oriented television on their perceived reality controlling for testing variables. Hypotheses are posed as follows.

H1: Parents' positive instructive mediation will positively predict teen children's instrumental use and perceived importance of violent television.

H2: Parents' negative instructive mediation will negatively predict teen children's instrumental use and perceived importance of violent television.

H3: Parents' restrictive mediation will negatively predict teen children's instrumental use and perceived importance of violent television.

H4: Parents' covieing will positively predict teen children's instrumental use and perceived importance of violent television.

H5: Peer interaction will positively predict teen children's instrumental use and perceived importance of violent television.

H6: Teen children's instrumental use and perceived importance of violent television will positively predict attention.

H7: Teen children's attention to violent television will positively predict perceived reality of danger and mistrust.

H8: Teen children's amount of violent television viewing will positively predict perceived reality of danger and mistrust.

Method and Research Procedures

A survey was conducted from December 5 to 16, 2005 from two small-sized private schools in one Southern city and two medium-sized public schools in two neighboring towns. After permission from the school principals for private schools and superintendents for public schools, teen children were asked to take a survey packet to their home. Each packet consisted of a cover letter, two consent forms for a parent and a child at age of 10 or older and two questionnaires. Of the 600 packets sent to homes of four schools, a total of 184 parent-child dyads (184 parents and 184 teen children; 12 families from private schools, 172 families from public schools) completed and returned both questionnaires representing a 30.6% response rate. In fact, a total of 192 surveys were returned. However, eight surveys were not analyzable due to rejection of participation (four), parent survey only (one), and consent forms only (three).

For the parents' survey, mediation styles and demographics were asked to the respondents. Children were asked to provide responses of peer interaction, instrumental use of television, perceived importance of television, involvement, and perceived reality. To test the proposed model, a path analysis was conducted. In the sample characteristics, scores on exogenous variables such as teen children's violent television viewing in the model exhibited skewness. Hence, their natural logarithms were used in the path analysis, which was conducted using the structural equation modeling program AMOS 6.0. For model fit indices, this study used *GFI* (Goodness of Fit Index), *NFI* (Normed Fit Index), and *RMSEA* (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation). A *GFI* and *NFI* over .95 and an *RMSEA* at or below .05 are considered a "well-fitting" model. A *GFI* and *NFI* over .90 indicate an acceptable model.

Summary of Findings

Hypothesis 1 predicted a positive relationship between positive instructive mediation and teen children's instrumental use and perceived importance of violent television. As Figure 2 shows, the hypothesis received no support. H2 for the relationship between negative instructive mediation and teen children's instrumental use and perceived importance did not receive support either.

H3 predicted a negative relationship between restrictive mediation and instrumental use and perceived importance. Figure 4 shows that this hypothesis is not supported. H4 for the relationship between coviewing and teen children's instrumental use and perceived importance was not supported.

H5 stated that peer interaction would positively predict teen children's instrumental use and perceived importance of violent television. This hypothesis received full support. Peer interaction positively predicted instrumental use with path coefficients ranging from .238 to .257 ($p < .001$) and perceived importance ranging from .565 to .575 ($p < .001$) in the four models.

H6 predicted a positive relationship between instrumental use and perceived importance and attention. Only perceived importance positively predicted attention with path coefficients ranging from .611 to .661 ($p < .001$) in the four models. Therefore, H6 received partial support.

H7 for the relationship between attention and danger and mistrust was only supported in the coviewing mediation model ($\beta = .152, p < .05$). H8 predicted a positive relationship between the amount of violent television viewing and danger and mistrust. This hypothesis received partial support in the relationship between television viewing and mistrust ($\beta = .151, p < .05$) in the four models.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In the current study, only parents' restrictive mediation predicted a path to teen children's instrumental use of violent television for their learning and personal utility. This instrumental use accounted for their perceived importance and a high level of attention paid to violent television. Theoretically speaking, the positive path from restrictive mediation to instrumental use is an unexpected result. There can be two potential explanations for this result. First, no matter how parents are restrictive in their child's viewing time and programs, children and adolescents keep their own viewing motives. In this view, the teen children ages 11-15 of the current sample may have another source for keeping their instrumental needs of violent and action-oriented television viewing.

Another notable finding regarding mediation and perceived reality is that the direct relationship between peer interaction and teen children's perceived danger is negative and significant. This result identifies that even though teen children consider peer interaction important, their perceived reality is not likely to be positively affected unless they process television information. Rather, those children and adolescents who do not process television information and are independently affected by peer interaction consider this world safe and reliable. Therefore, peer interaction, when it does not lead to teen children's violent and action-oriented television viewing behaviors, can yield teen children's positive real life outcomes. In this light, peer interaction holds the traits of two sides of a coin. Peer interaction exhibits both positive and negative outcomes in teen children's television viewing. Peers can make teen children think that some unacceptable behaviors by parents can be acceptable by peers or vice versa.