

Television in the Home

The 1997 Survey of Parents and Children

Analysis by Jeffrey D. Stanger

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JEFFREY D. STANGER is Associate Director of the Annenberg Public Policy Center, Washington. He holds a B.A. from UCLA and an M.A. from the Annenberg School for Communication, University of Pennsylvania.

KATHLEEN HALL JAMIESON directed this research. Jamieson is Professor of Communication and Dean of the Annenberg School for Communication, and Director of the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania.

Acknowledgments

Melissa J. Herrmann, Project Director, Chilton Research Services, Inc.
Ken Winneg, Research Manager, Chilton Research Services, Inc.
Douglas Rivlin, Director, Annenberg Public Policy Center, Washington
Amy Jordan, Ph.D., Senior Research Investigator, Annenberg Public Policy Center
Deborah Stinnett, Project Coordinator, Annenberg Public Policy Center

About the Annenberg Public Policy Center

The Annenberg Public Policy Center was established by publisher and philanthropist Walter Annenberg in 1994 to create a community of scholars within the University of Pennsylvania that would address public policy issues at the local, state, and federal levels. Consistent with the mission of the Annenberg School for Communication, the Center has four ongoing foci: Information and Society, Media and the Developing Mind, Media and the Dialogue of Democracy, and Health Communication. Each year, as well, a special area of scholarly interest is addressed. The Center supports research and sponsors lectures and conferences in these areas. This series of publications disseminates the work of the Center.

INTRODUCTION AND METHOD

“Television in the Home: The 1997 Survey of Parents and Children” is the second annual national survey commissioned by the Annenberg Public Policy Center (APPC) to assess the views of parents and children about children’s television. This project was inaugurated in 1996 as a complement to the Center’s annual evaluation of the content of children’s television (this year “The 1997 State of Children’s Television Report”). The survey results and the Center’s other research reports on children’s television are released at the APPC Annual Conference on Children and Television in early June.

This report is organized into four sections. The first is an overview of the media environment in American homes with children. The second reports what children view, how much they view, how they spend their time in the home and the level of supervision provided by parents. The third focuses on children’s and parents’ opinions of children’s television – its quality and possible effects. The final section reports the survey’s findings on a number of timely issues, including the new television rating system, labeling of educational and informational programming, and the V-Chip.

The Annenberg Public Policy Center commissioned Chilton Research Services, Inc. of Radnor, Pennsylvania to conduct interviews with parents of two to seventeen year old children, and with young people ages ten to seventeen. Interviews were done between April 16 and April 30, 1997. Using random digit dialing as the sample selection method, telephone interviews were completed with 1,228 parents. If the parent had more than one child aged two to seventeen, the parent was asked to focus throughout the interview on the child who had had the most recent birthday. If this child was between the ages of ten and seventeen, that young person was asked to participate in the youth survey. As many as possible of these ten to seventeen year olds were interviewed. If this particular child was not available, a brother or sister age ten to seventeen was substituted. If a two to nine year old was the focus of the parent’s remarks, and that child had an older brother or sister, the older child was interviewed. In total, 297 young people between the ages of ten and seventeen were interviewed. The parents’ interviews lasted an average of thirty minutes, and the survey of 10-17 year olds averaged fifteen minutes in length.

The margin of error for the sample of parents (n= 1,228) is $\pm 3.4\%$, and for the sample of young people (n= 297) is $\pm 5.1\%$. (In 1996, 1,205 parents and 308 of their children were interviewed.¹)

Throughout this report the term “parents” refers to the full sample of parents of children two to seventeen years of age. Unless otherwise noted, the full samples of parents and children were used in the analysis.

¹ For more details on the 1996 survey, see “Children/Parents: Television in the Home.” The Annenberg Public Policy Center. Survey Series No. 1, 1996.

The sample of parents has been weighted to the national census, using race, education level and geographic region as parameters. The sample of 10-17 year olds was weighted using sex, age and geographic region.

1 MEDIA IN THE HOME

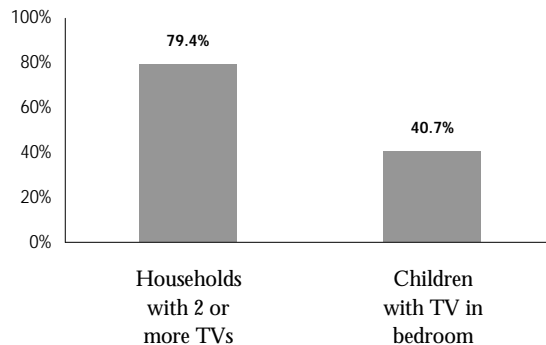
MOST HOUSEHOLDS HAVE TWO OR MORE TELEVISIONS

Nearly eighty percent of households with children between ages two and seventeen have more than one working television set. The homes surveyed reported having an average of 2.5 working television sets per household.

Two in five (40.7%) children between two and seventeen have television sets in their bedrooms.

FIG. 1

TELEVISION SETS IN THE HOME

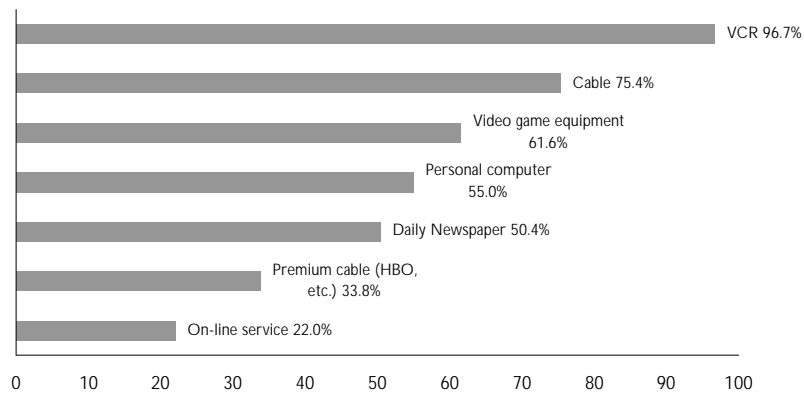


VCRS, CABLE, VIDEO GAME EQUIPMENT AND COMPUTERS ARE MORE PREVALENT THAN NEWSPAPER SUBSCRIPTIONS

The VCR is the most common media delivery system in homes with televisions. Only half the households surveyed reported having a subscription to a daily newspaper, but nearly two-thirds have video game equipment such as Sega or Nintendo.

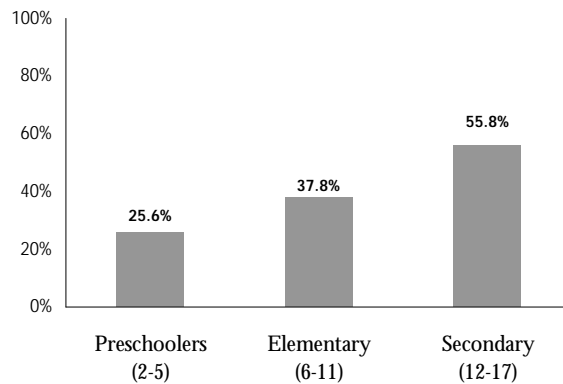
FIG. 2

MEDIA IN THE HOME



As children age they are increasingly likely to have a television set in their bedroom. One in four preschoolers (25.6%) has a TV in his or her bedroom, and over half (55.8%) of secondary school aged young people have a set in their room.

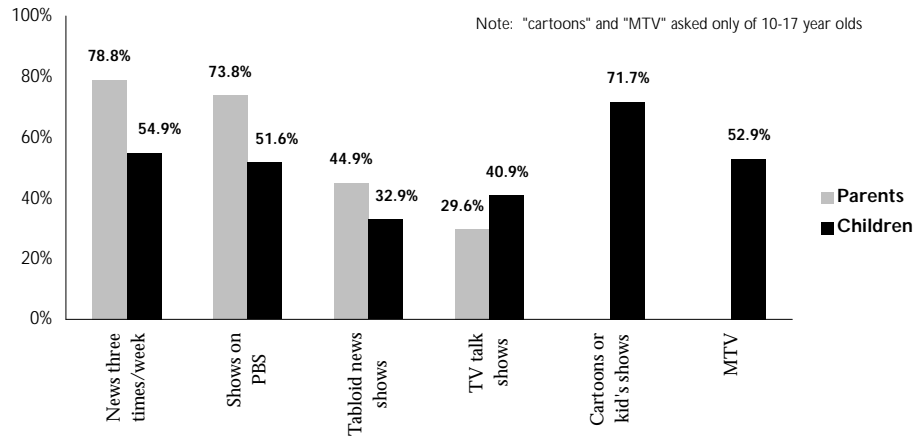
FIG. 3
TV SETS IN THE BEDROOM



WHAT'S ON THE SET?

Parents report being more likely to watch the national TV news three times per week, regularly watch shows on PBS, and watch tabloid news programs (e.g., *Hard Copy*, *Inside Edition*, *A Current Affair*, etc.), but 10-17 year olds are more likely to watch television talk shows (e.g., *Ricki Lake*, *Jenny Jones*, *Montel*, *Geraldo*, etc.) than parents. Nearly three quarters of 10-17 year olds watch cartoons or other kid's programs, and over half watch MTV.

FIG. 4
WHAT'S ON TV



2

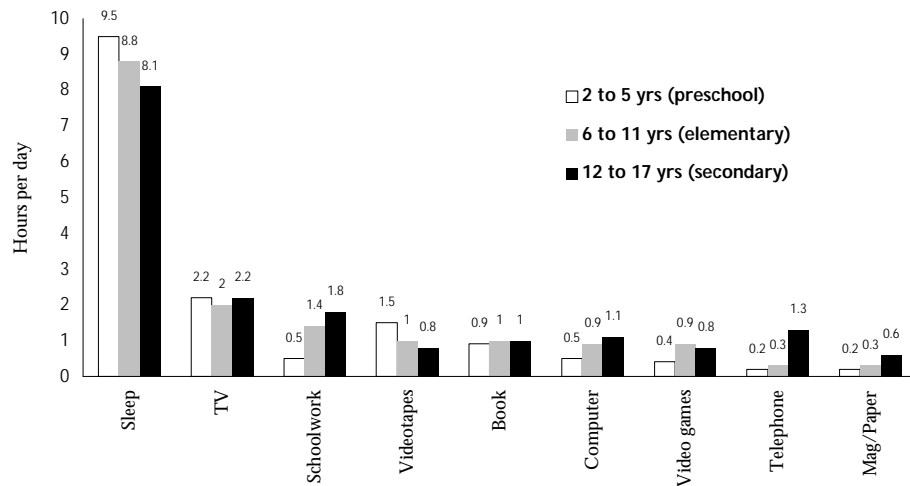
CHILDREN, TELEVISION AND PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

CHILDREN WATCH 2.1 HOURS OF TELEVISION PER DAY, SECOND ONLY TO THE TIME THEY SPEND SLEEPING, PARENTS REPORT

Of the nine in-home activities measured, after sleeping (8.8 hours), watching television was the most common use of time by children, according to their parents. Children 2-17 spend on average 2.1 hours in front of the television, more than doing schoolwork (1.3 hours), reading a book (.99 hours), using the home computer (.87hours²), playing video games such as Sega or Nintendo (.75 hours³), or reading a magazine or newspaper (.38 hours). Children also spend an average of 1.1 hours per day in front of their sets watching videotapes.

Television viewing is one of the few activities that does not differ based on the child's age. Sleeping and watching videotapes decrease as the child grows older, while doing schoolwork, using the home computer, playing video games, talking on the telephone, and reading a magazine or newspaper increase as the child ages. Television viewing and book reading are the only two activities that are not related to the child's age. Viewing remains consistent at about two hours per day among preschool, elementary, and secondary school age groups, and book reading remains at roughly one hour per day among all three age categories.

FIG. 5
CHILD'S
ACTIVITIES IN
THE HOME



Parents report watching more television on average than their children. Parents watch an average of 2.4 hours per day, about twenty minutes more than their children (or the equivalent of over two hours more per week).

² Asked only of those with computers in the home

³ Asked only of those with video game equipment

A TELEVISION SET IN THE BEDROOM IS ASSOCIATED WITH MORE VIEWING

Children with television sets in their bedrooms watch an average of 21 minutes more per day (or nearly 2½ hours more per week) than those without. Children with sets in their bedrooms watch 2.33 hours of TV per day, compared to 1.98 by children without their own set (difference in means, $p < .001$)

FEW PARENTS FEEL THEIR CHILDREN WATCH TOO MUCH TELEVISION

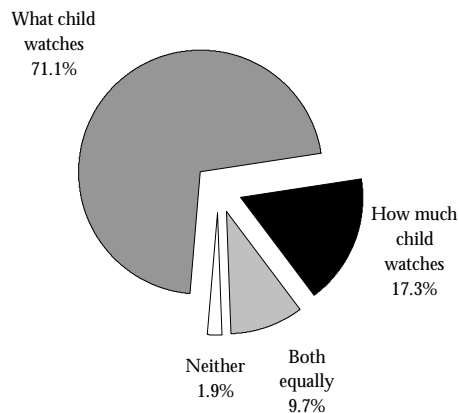
Although television viewing surpasses many other in-home activities in time spent by children, only one in five parents (20.8%) feels their children watch too much television.

PARENTS ARE MORE CONCERNED ABOUT WHAT THEIR CHILDREN WATCH THAN HOW MUCH THEY WATCH; UNCHANGED FROM 1996

Despite the prominent role television plays in the home activity of children (based on time spent), when asked which concerns them most about their child's television viewing, parents were much more likely to say **what** their children watch was of more concern (71.1%) than **how much** they watch (17.3%). This result is consistent with the finding in 1996, when 70% of parents reported "what their child watches" was of most concern.⁴

FIG. 6

WHAT CONCERNS PARENTS MOST ABOUT TELEVISION



⁴ "Children/Parents: Television in the Home." The Annenberg Public Policy Center. Survey Series No. 1, 1996. p. 4.

TELEVISION RANKS LOW AMONG KIDS AS A TOPIC OF CONVERSATION, AND AS AN ACTIVITY DIFFICULT TO DO WITHOUT

Only a small percentage of adolescents 10-17 report that television is the thing they talk about most with their friends and family. Referring to conversation with their friends, young people 10-17 rank television last among eight topics, behind “other friends,” sports, music, school, movies, video games, and current events. Only 3.2% identified television as the topic they talk about most with friends. With their families, the topics of conversation shift sharply toward school and current events, but television remains a minor topic.

FIG. 7

| MOST COMMON CONVERSATION TOPICS WITH FRIENDS AND FAMILY | with Friends | | with Family | |
|--|---------------------|-------------------------|--------------------|-------|
| | friends | 29.9% | school | 50.0% |
| sports | 26.0 | news and current events | 27.4 | |
| music | 12.5 | friends | 8.9 | |
| school | 9.5 | sports | 6.3 | |
| movies | 8.4 | television | 3.0 | |
| video games | 5.7 | movies | 2.0 | |
| news and current events | 4.1 | music | 1.3 | |
| television | 3.2 | video games | 0.2 | |

Only a small percentage of the 10-17 year olds interviewed stated that television would be the most difficult thing to give up for a week. According to the sample of children, sports would be the most difficult thing to do without (29.9% report it as the activity most difficult to give up for a week), talking on the telephone ranked second (20.7%), and watching television third (17.1%). Children reported that listening to music (15.2%), reading books and magazines (9.5%), and using a computer (6.7%) would be easier to give up for a week than watching television.

The survey found significant differences between boys and girls in the activities they find most difficult to give up. The largest percentage of boys 10-17 said sports would be most difficult to give up (41.5%), while talking on the telephone was most likely to be reported by girls 10-17 as the most difficult to do without (35.5%).

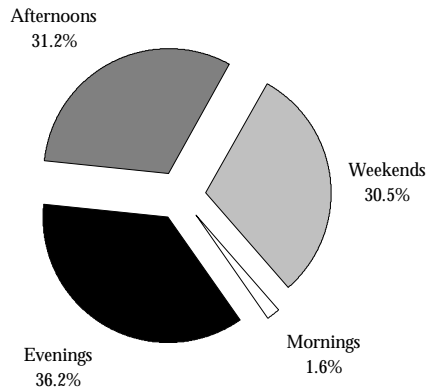
FIG. 8

| MOST DIFFICULT THINGS TO GIVE UP FOR A WEEK | Boys 10-17 | | Girls 10-17 | |
|--|-------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|-------|
| | playing sports | 41.5% | talking on the telephone | 35.5% |
| watching television | 18.1 | listening to music | 20.0 | |
| using a computer | 11.2 | playing sports | 17.9 | |
| listening to music | 10.6 | watching television | 16.1 | |
| reading books or magazines | 10.3 | reading books or magazines | 8.6 | |
| talking on the telephone | 6.5 | using a computer | 1.9 | |

VERY FEW CHILDREN DO MOST OF THEIR VIEWING ON WEEKDAY MORNINGS

Young people 10-17 are equally likely to do most of their television viewing in the afternoons after school, in the evenings after dinner, and on weekends. However, only 1.6% report that they do most of their viewing in the mornings before school.

FIG. 9
WHEN KIDS WATCH THE MOST TELEVISION

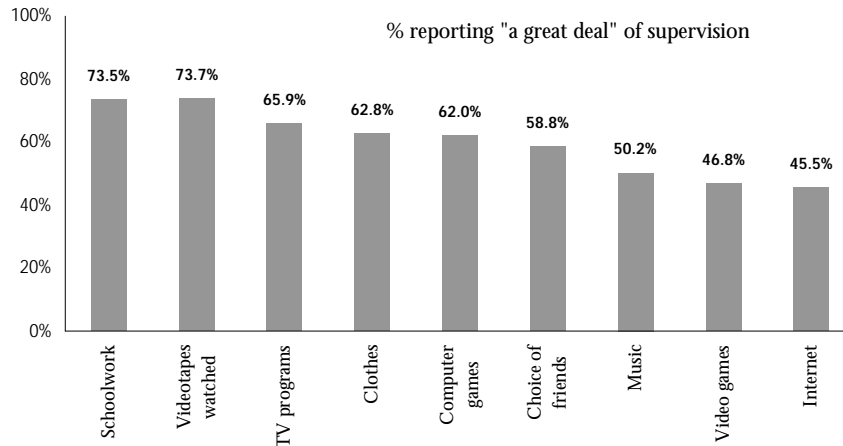


PARENTS ARE HIGHLY INVOLVED IN THEIR CHILD'S TV VIEWING

Of parents of 2-17 year olds, nearly half (49.0%) report "almost always" watching television with their children. Nearly as many (43.2%) report watching with their child "once in a while." Only a small percentage (7.6%) "rarely" or "never" sits down with their children when they watch television.

Two-thirds (65.9%) of parents say they provide a "great deal" of supervision over their children's television viewing. However, schoolwork and the videotapes children watch are more closely monitored by parents than television viewing.

FIG. 10
PARENTAL SUPERVISION OF ACTIVITIES



HOUSEHOLD RULES GOVERNING TELEVISION VIEWING ARE COMMON

Over two-thirds of parents (68.9%) report having established rules in their homes governing their children’s television viewing. The most common rule is not allowing one’s child to watch certain programs (91.7% of those with established rules prohibit certain programs). Of parents with rules, 75.8% only allow their children to watch after doing homework or chores, 69.8% limit the number of hours their children can watch, and 67.6% restrict viewing to certain parts of the day.

PARENTAL RULES ARE EFFECTIVE AT LIMITING VIEWING, DATA SUGGEST

The data show a significant difference in the amount of viewing between children in households with established rules governing television viewing and those in homes without rules. Children in households with established rules watch an average of sixteen fewer minutes of television per day (the equivalent of just under two fewer hours per week) than those in households without rules (2.04 hours per day with rules, 2.31 hours without, $p < .01$).

MTV, FOX SHOWS TOP LIST OF TELEVISION PROHIBITED BY PARENTS

A majority of 10-17 year olds (60.8%) reports that there are specific programs or networks their parents prohibit them from viewing. Beavis and Butthead, the MTV network, and three Fox programs⁵ top the list of parentally-banned television. Fewer 10-17 year olds (41.9%) report that there are specific programs their parents encourage them to watch. Parents most often encourage news viewing.

FIG. 11

PARENTAL PROHIBITION AND ENCOURAGEMENT OF VIEWING

| | top 5 shows/networks parents prohibit kids from watching | top 5 shows/networks parents encourage kids to watch | |
|---------------------|---|---|-----|
| beavis and butthead | 21% | news (any) | 17% |
| the simpsons | 9 | discovery channel | 8 |
| mtv network | 8 | national geographic | 6 |
| x-files | 6 | bill nye the science guy | 5 |
| melrose place | 5 | touched by an angel | 5 |

ONE QUARTER OF YOUNG PEOPLE WATCH PROGRAMS THEIR PARENTS DON’T APPROVE OF

Of young people 10-17, 26.3% report watching television programs their parents, if they knew, would not approve of them watching.

⁵ The Simpsons, in addition to running on Fox, also airs in syndication.

3

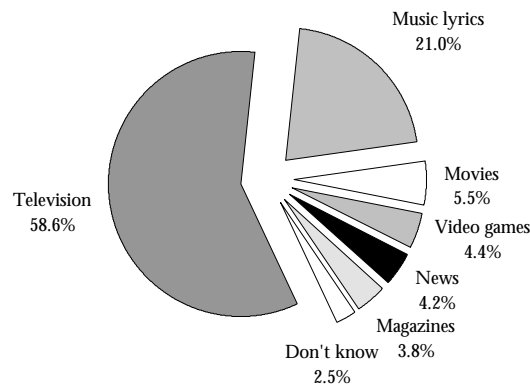
WHAT PARENTS AND CHILDREN THINK ABOUT TV

PARENTS ARE MOST CONCERNED ABOUT THE INFLUENCE OF TELEVISION

Of the various potential media influences on children, what children see on television was named as the biggest concern by the largest percentage of parents (58.6%). “What kids are exposed to on television” ranked as the number one concern of parents for the second consecutive year.⁶ Music lyrics (21.0%), movies (5.5%), video games (4.4%), things children see or read in the news (4.2%), and magazines (3.8%) trail television as concerns of parents.

FIG. 12

INFLUENCES OF MOST CONCERN TO PARENTS



PARENTS HOLD A MORE NEGATIVE OPINION OF CHILDREN'S TELEVISION PROGRAMMING THAN CHILDREN

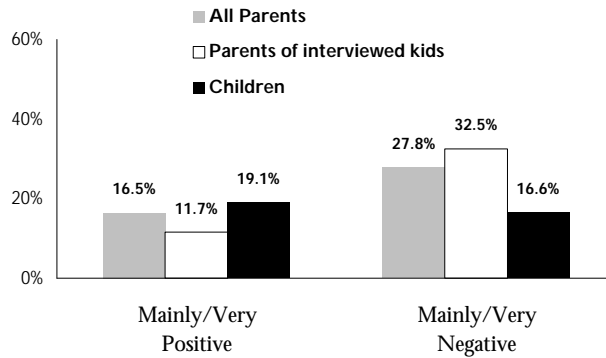
The survey found 27.8% of parents hold a “mainly negative” or “very negative” opinion of what is on television for young people, while only 16.6% of young people 10-17 reported “mainly” or “very” negative opinions. The majority of parents and children display mixed feelings about children’s television (55.0% of parents and 63.8% of children hold both “positive and negative” feelings). When compared directly to the responses of their own parents – 32.5% of these parents had a mainly or very negative opinion – children still display more positive opinions.⁷ The figure below shows the responses of 10-17 year olds compared both to the total sample of parents and to only their own parents.

⁶ “Children/Parents: Television in the Home.” The Annenberg Public Policy Center. Survey Series No. 1, 1996. p. 4.

⁷ Responses here are only of the parents of the children who participated in the interview, n= 297.

FIG. 13

OPINIONS OF CHILDREN'S TELEVISION

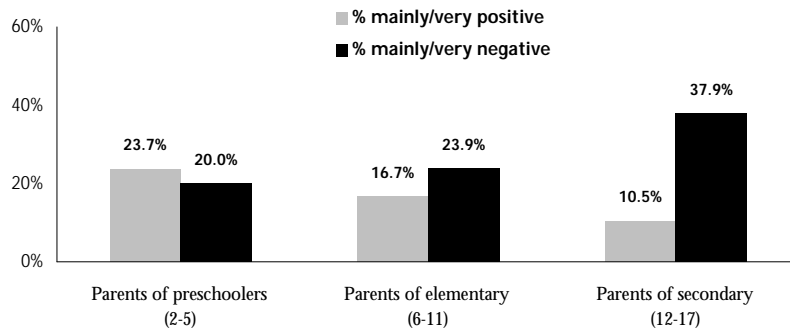


PARENTS OF YOUNGER CHILDREN HAVE A MORE POSITIVE OPINION OF CHILDREN'S TV THAN PARENTS OF ADOLESCENTS

As the age of children increases, parental satisfaction with programming available for their children decreases. Parents of preschoolers have the most positive opinion of the quality of children's television (23.7% report "mainly" or "very" positive opinions), but only 10.5% of parents of secondary school age young people report positive feelings about what is on television for children. Over one-third (37.9%) of parents of secondary school age adolescents say they have "mainly" or "very" negative opinions of television programs for children.

FIG. 14

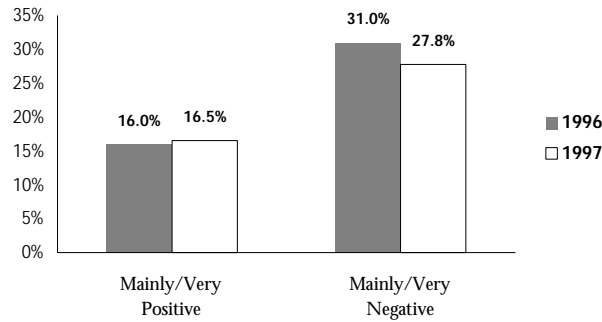
OPINIONS OF CHILDREN'S TELEVISION BY AGE OF CHILD



**PARENTS' OPINION OF THE QUALITY OF CHILDREN'S TELEVISION
SIMILAR TO 1996**

FIG. 15

PARENTS' OPINION OF CHILDREN'S TELEVISION BY YEAR

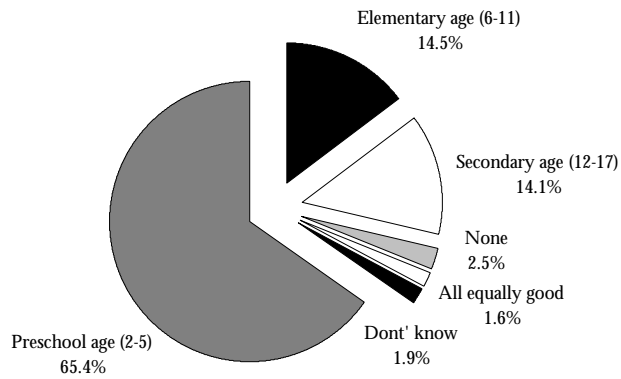


PRESCHOOLERS ARE OFFERED THE BEST PROGRAMS, PARENTS SAY

Two-thirds of parents (65.4%) say that preschool children ages 2-5 are offered the best programs. Few parents believe elementary age children 6-11 (14.5%) or secondary school age young people 12-17 (14.1%) are offered the best programs.

FIG. 16

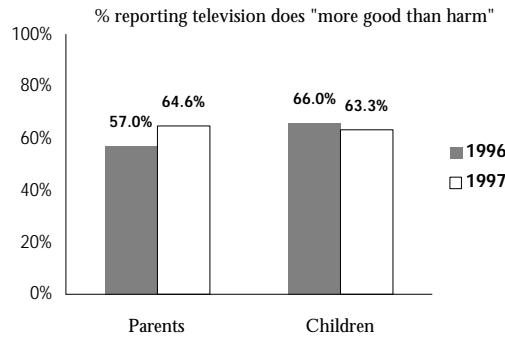
WHAT AGE GROUP PARENTS FEEL IS OFFERED THE BEST TELEVISION



MOST PARENTS AND CHILDREN HAVE POSITIVE OPINIONS OF THE POSSIBLE EFFECTS OF TELEVISION

The majority of parents and children feel television has done, or is doing, "more good than harm." This finding is consistent with 1996.

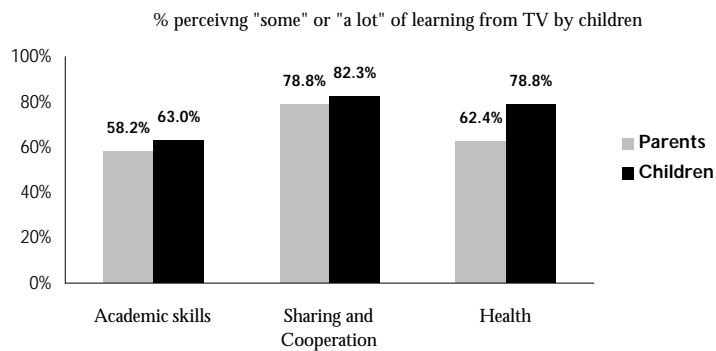
FIG. 17
PERCEIVED EFFECTS OF TELEVISION



BOTH PARENTS AND CHILDREN BELIEVE THAT CHILDREN LEARN FROM TELEVISION

Significant majorities of parents and children perceive "some" or "a lot" of learning by children from television in three key areas: academic skills such as reading, writing, and math; learning how to get along with others through sharing and cooperation; and learning how to maintain a healthy body. Adolescents 10-17 are even more likely than parents to hold that television has helped them learn.

FIG. 18
PERCEIVED LEARNING FROM TELEVISION

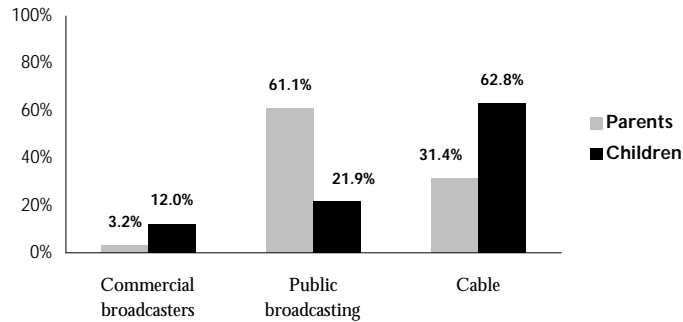


PARENTS BELIEVE PUBLIC BROADCASTING HAS THE BEST SHOWS FOR CHILDREN, WHILE YOUNG PEOPLE SAY THE BEST SHOWS ARE ON CABLE

The majority of parents (61.1%) believe that public broadcasting has the best programs to offer children. Ten to seventeen year olds have a very different opinion of who offers the best programs for young people – 62.8% say cable television, and only 21.0% say public broadcasting. Few parents (3.2%) or children (12.0%) believe the best programs are on commercial broadcast networks.

FIG. 19

WHERE PARENTS AND CHILDREN THINK BEST PROGRAMS CAN BE FOUND

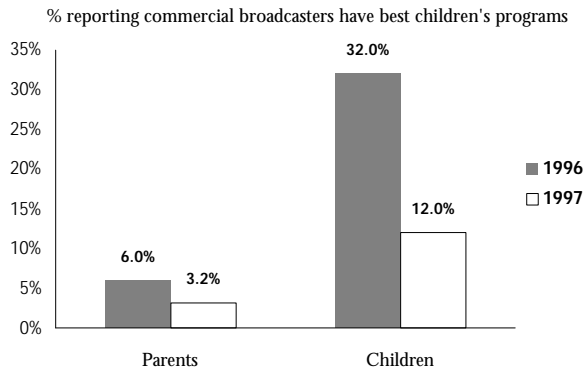


OPINION OF BROADCAST NETWORK CHILDREN’S TELEVISION DOWN FROM 1996

Opinion of commercial broadcast networks’ offerings appears to have dropped since 1996 among parents, but most noticeably among children.⁸

FIG. 20

OPINION OF NETWORK BROADCASTERS’ CHILDREN’S PROGRAMS



⁸ For parent survey results from 1996, see “Children/Parents: Television in the Home.” The Annenberg Public Policy Center. Survey Series No. 1, 1996. p. 10.

FAVORITE PROGRAMS OF YOUNG PEOPLE 10-17

Nearly one hundred different programs were named as favorites by the sample of 10-17 year olds. The top five favorites are listed below:

FIG. 21

**FAVORITE
PROGRAMS OF
10-17 YEAR
OLDS**

| favorite shows of 10-17 year olds | |
|-----------------------------------|----|
| seinfeld | 7% |
| home improvement | 4 |
| family matters | 4 |
| simpsons | 3 |
| martin | 3 |
| (11 shows with 2%) | |

BEST CHILDREN'S PROGRAMS ACCORDING TO PARENTS

When asked to name up to five good programs for children, parents mentioned over one hundred different shows. The top ten children's shows according to parents are:

FIG. 22

**GOOD
PROGRAMS
ACCORDING
TO PARENTS**

| good children's programs as perceived by parents | |
|--|-----|
| sesame street | 21% |
| barney | 20 |
| magic schoolbus | 6 |
| home improvement | 6 |
| family matters | 6 |
| bill nye, the science guy | 5 |
| gullah gullah island | 5 |
| rugrats | 5 |
| blues clues | 5 |
| national geographic | 5 |

NOTE

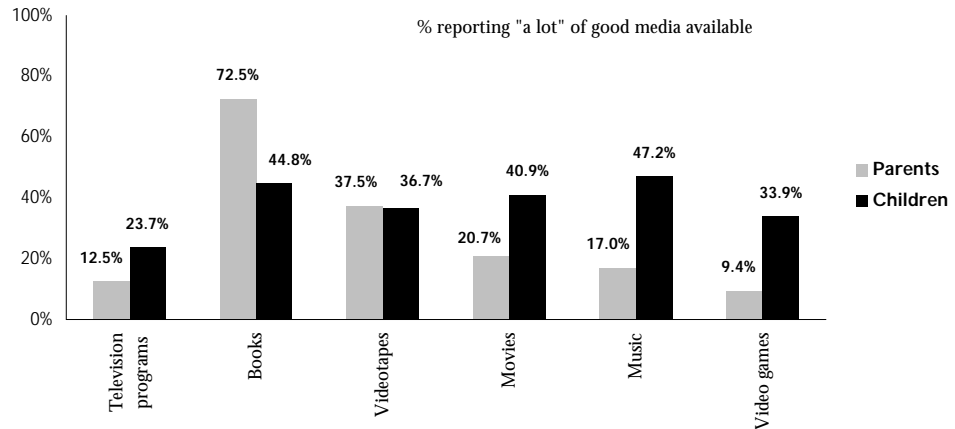
The 10-17 year olds were asked to name their favorite program, which may or may not have been a program designed for young people. Parents were asked to name up to five programs they consider to be good programs for children. Therefore, the list of "favorite" programs of 10-17 year olds is not necessarily comparable to the list of what parents consider "good" programs designed for children.

PARENTS AND YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE DIFFERENT VIEWS OF WHAT QUALITY MEDIA ARE AVAILABLE FOR KIDS, BUT AGREE THERE IS NOT A LOT OF GOOD TELEVISION

Only 23.7% of the young people interviewed believe there are a lot of good TV shows available for them, and even fewer parents (12.5%) think there is a lot of good television available for kids. Other quality media for young people are seen to be more prevalent than good television.

FIG. 23

PERCEIVED AMOUNT OF QUALITY MEDIA



4

ISSUES 1997: RATINGS, EDUCATIONAL TV, THE V-CHIP

MANY PARENTS AND CHILDREN ARE AWARE THAT NETWORKS NOW RATE THEIR PROGRAMS

Of parents of 2-17 year olds, 69.5% are aware that networks provide information on the screen about the appropriateness of programs for people of different ages. Of 10-17 year olds, 80.2% are aware of the new rating system.

THERE IS CONFUSION AMONG PARENTS AND CHILDREN ABOUT WHAT SOME RATINGS MEAN

When asked to match a particular rating (TV-14 was used) to its meaning from a complete list of actual ratings definitions⁹, very few parents or children were able to do so correctly. Only 5.9% of parents and 6.4% of 10-17 year olds correctly matched TV-14 with its definition, “parents strongly cautioned.” TV-14 was most often incorrectly thought to mean “directed to older children” (the definition of TV-Y7, a rating applied to programs specifically designed for children) and “parental guidance suggested” (TV-PG).

FIG. 24

WHAT DOES
THE RATING
“TV-14”
MEAN?

| | Parents | Children |
|---|------------|------------|
| “All children” (TV-Y) | 2.7% | 3.1% |
| “Directed to older children” (TV-Y7) | 45.7 | 41.5 |
| “General audience” (TV-G) | 5.0 | 4.6 |
| “Parental guidance suggested” (TV-PG) | 22.4 | 19.7 |
| “Parents strongly cautioned” (TV-14) correct | 5.9 | 6.4 |
| “Mature audiences only” (TV-M) | 3.2 | 14.2 |

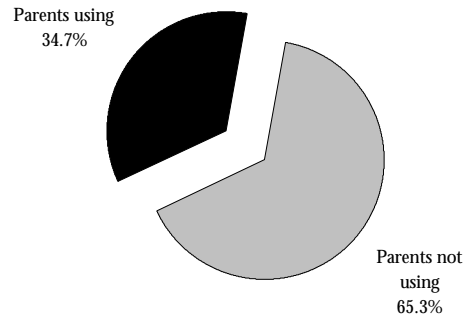
ONLY ONE-THIRD OF PARENTS ARE USING THE RATINGS TO GUIDE THEIR CHILD’S VIEWING

While 69.5% of parents are aware that networks now rate their programs, only about one-third (34.7%) say they are using the new rating system to guide their child’s viewing behavior. Of those who are using the system, 18.9% are using it to encourage their children to watch appropriate programs, 14.1% are using it to discourage viewing of inappropriate programs, and 64.6% say they are using it for both purposes.

⁹ Definitions were drawn from “TV Parental Guidelines,” a publication of the National Association of Broadcasters. These guidelines were also published in *TV Guide* (March 29-April 4, 1997, p. 149).

FIG. 25

USE OF TV RATING SYSTEM TO GUIDE CHILD'S VIEWING



FEWER PARENTS AND CHILDREN ARE AWARE OF THE 'E/I' SYMBOL IDENTIFYING EDUCATIONAL AND INFORMATIONAL PROGRAMMING

Only 46.7% of parents and 58.5% of 10-17 year olds are aware that networks provide information on the screen about which of their programs are educational or informational children's programs (the 'E/I' symbol) – significantly fewer than are aware that networks rate their programs.

ONLY A HANDFUL OF PARENTS AND CHILDREN KNOW WHAT THE 'E/I' SYMBOL MEANS

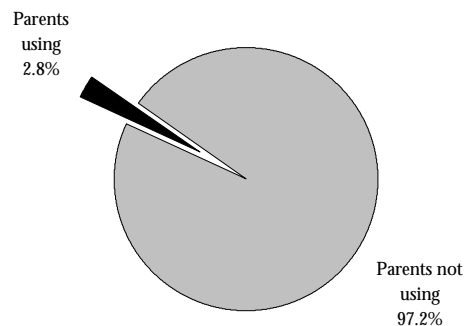
The survey showed that only 2.4% of parents and 2.1% of children know that the 'E/I' symbol stands for "educational or informational" programming. Respondents needed only to mention either "educational" or "informational," or a synonym, to be given credit for a correct response.

VERY FEW PARENTS ARE USING THE 'E/I' LABEL TO GUIDE VIEWING

Only 2.8% of parents of children 2-17 are using the 'E/I' symbol to guide their child's viewing.

FIG. 26

USE OF 'E/I' SYMBOL TO GUIDE CHILD'S VIEWING

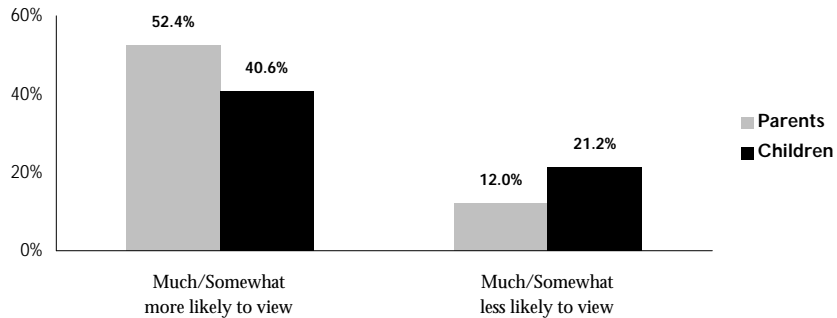


YOUNG PEOPLE SAY THEY WOULD NOT TURN AWAY FROM EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS; PARENTS AGREE

The responses of both 10-17 year olds and parents suggest that labeling a program “educational” would not drive young viewers away, but might actually attract them. The majority of parents said their child would be “much” or “somewhat” more likely to watch a program the child knew to be an educational children’s program. Of the 10-17 year olds surveyed, two in five reported they would be “much” or “somewhat” more likely to watch a program identified as educational. Only a small percentage of parents said their child would be less likely to view a program if he/she knew it was an educational program, and about one in five children said they would be less likely to view.

FIG. 27

LIKELIHOOD OF VIEWING A PROGRAM IDENTIFIED AS ‘EDUCATIONAL’

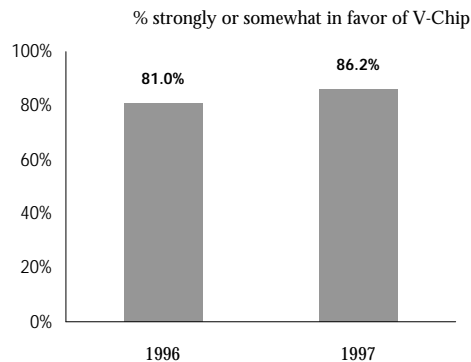


SUPPORT AMONG PARENTS FOR THE V-CHIP TECHNOLOGY REMAINS HIGH

Last year’s Annenberg survey of parents found that 81% either “strongly” or “somewhat” favored implementation of the V-Chip technology.¹⁰ In this year’s survey, 86.2% report being “strongly” or “somewhat” in favor of the technology, and only 11.6% say they “strongly” or “somewhat” oppose the V-Chip. The difference between the years is within the margin of error of the two polls.

FIG. 28

SUPPORT FOR V-CHIP TECHNOLOGY



¹⁰ “Children/Parents: Television in the Home.” The Annenberg Public Policy Center. Survey Series No. 1, 1996. p. 5.