

Television in the Home 1998

The Third Annual National Survey of Parents and Children

Analysis by Jeffrey D. Stanger

| | | |
|----------|----------------------------------|----|
| | Introduction and Methodology | 3 |
| 1 | Public Affairs and News | 5 |
| 2 | Diversity on Television | 7 |
| 3 | New Media in the Home | 11 |
| 4 | Opinion of Kids' TV 1996-1998 | 14 |
| 5 | Television in the Home 1996-1998 | 19 |
| 6 | Ratings, E/I and the V-Chip | 25 |

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 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.

Acknowledgements

Melissa J. Herrmann, Project Director, Chilton Research Services, Inc.
Amy B. Jordan, Ph.D., Senior Research Investigator, Annenberg Public Policy Center
Douglas G. Rivlin, Washington Director, 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

This is the third Annenberg Public Policy Center survey of parents and children – Television in the Home. Inaugurated in 1996, the national poll has measured parents' and children's opinions of television programming, their viewing and other media-related behaviors, and knowledge of and attitudes toward relevant policy issues such as the Federal Communications Commission's three-hour processing guideline, the new ratings system for television programming, and the V-chip.

In addition to containing elements found in prior surveys, this year's report addresses three new issues – public affairs and news, diversity on television, and adoption and use of computer and online technologies in the home. First we address parents' and children's knowledge of public and popular culture figures, asking to what extent both parents and children are more likely to know who or what is on television than who is running the country. We find that significant proportions of 10-17 year-olds cannot name the Vice President of the United States, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, or one of the two women justices on the Supreme Court. However, they can almost universally identify popular culture icons such as The Simpsons, Seinfeld and Dennis Rodman. Additionally, we report on parents' and children's trust in news institutions and their use of these sources of information. Parents and children tend to trust television news more than the newspaper. Finally, the data show that reported viewership of television news has remained constant or increased over the past three years, but newspaper subscriptions in homes with children are down significantly.

The Annenberg Public Policy Center has chosen diversity on television as a special area of focus for the 1998 conference and research agenda. Our survey asked parents and children their opinions on the inclusion of racial and gender diversity in television programming, as well as how much children feel they can relate to the characters they see on TV. Overall, parents and 10-17 year-olds say television is doing a good job representing minorities, women and girls. Both samples said that TV does a better of including such characters than it does of portraying them.

The Center's polling shows that adoption of media delivery systems, including VCR's, video game equipment, cable television and premium cable are stable over time, with one distinct exception – information technologies. This report contains a special section devoted to examination of the upward trend in computer and online use among children and parents, and what population subgroups, if any, are being left behind in the information revolution. Personal computers have now reached into 61.5% and online access 32.2% of homes with children. The growth, however, is seen in middle income households. There has been little or no growth in low-income households.

Methodology

As in prior years, telephone interviews were conducted with a national random sample of parents and children in homes with televisions. To include unlisted numbers, the sample was drawn using random digit dialing. A total of 1,208 parents of children 2-17 and 300 of their children ages 10-17 were interviewed in 1998.¹ The margins of error are $\pm 3.0\%$ for the sample of parents and $\pm 6.2\%$ for the sample of 10-17 year-olds. Interviews were conducted by Chilton Research Services between April 16 and May 4, 1998.

¹ Sample sizes for 1997 were n=1,228 parents and n=297 10-17 year-olds. In 1996, 1,205 parents and 308 10-17 year-olds were interviewed.

In the interview with the parent, the respondent is asked to focus on one particular child when answering the questions. In cases in which there was more than one child in the household between the ages of two and seventeen, the parent was asked to focus on the child who had had the most recent birthday. In households where there was a child aged ten to seventeen, the parent's permission was asked to interview that child. This child may or may not have been the focus of the parent interview.

To ensure representativeness, the samples were weighted to the U.S. Census by race, education, and geographic region for the sample of parents; and sex, age and geographic region for the sample of 10-17 year-olds.

1

Public Affairs and News

For the first time in 1998, the Television in the Home national survey assessed parents' and children's knowledge of public and popular culture figures. The results show quite strongly that both parents and children are more likely to know television characters and sports figures than who is running the country.

Only 5.6% of 10-17 year-olds were able to correctly name one of the two women on the United States Supreme Court, only one in four (23.1%) could name the Speaker of the House, and only 58.1% could correctly identify the Vice President of the United States. By comparison, nearly all of the young people could identify *The Simpsons* as the television program with characters named Homer, Bart and Maggie (94.6%). Three in four knew *Seinfeld* was the show with characters Jerry, George, Elaine and Kramer (74.1%). An equal proportion correctly named Dennis Rodman as the Chicago Bulls' star who dyes his hair (74.7%). Just under half knew the program *Melrose Place* airs on the Fox television network (46.1%).

Although significantly more knowledgeable about public figures than 10-17 year-olds, parents were also lacking on many of these measures. Three in four could not name one of the two women judges on the U.S. Supreme Court, more than half did not know the name of the Speaker of the House, and nearly one quarter did not know the name of the Vice President. Meanwhile 85.1% identified *The Simpsons*, three quarters (72.2%) correctly recognized *Seinfeld*, and nearly two-thirds (63.7%) correctly named Dennis Rodman.

Children 10-17 were significantly more likely than parents to correctly identify *The Simpsons* and Rodman, but there is no significant difference between the accuracy of parents and children on identification of *Seinfeld* or Fox as the network on which *Melrose Place* airs.

Figure 1.1

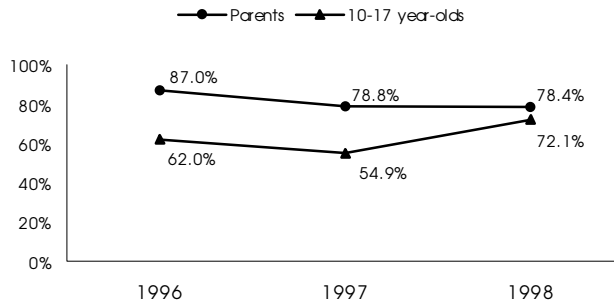
Knowledge of Public and Popular Culture Figures (percent correct)

| Question | Parents | 10-17 year-olds |
|---|---------|-----------------|
| Can you tell me what TV show has characters named Homer, Bart and Maggie? (The Simpsons) | 85.1% | 94.6% |
| Can you tell me what TV show has characters named Jerry, George, Elaine and Kramer? (Seinfeld) | 72.2 | 74.1 |
| Can you tell me who the professional basketball star is who dyes his hair and plays for the Chicago Bulls? (Dennis Rodman) | 63.7 | 74.7 |
| Can you tell me on what TV network the show <i>Melrose Place</i> airs? (Fox or E!) | 40.3 | 46.1 |
| Can you tell me the name of the Vice President of the United States? (Al Gore) | 78.0 | 58.1 |
| Can you tell me the name of one of the women on the United States Supreme Court? (Sandra Day O'Connor or Ruth Bader Ginsburg) | 25.3 | 5.6 |
| Can you tell me the name of the speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives? (Newt Gingrich) | 47.1 | 23.1 |
| Can you tell me on what kind of TV program you would see Peter Jennings, Tom Brokaw or Dan Rather? (News) | 89.0 | 51.8 |

After a decrease from 1996 to 1997, viewing of television news has not changed noticeably among parents in 1998. There was a marked increase this year in the proportion of 10-17 year-olds who report watching the national television news at least three times per week. Nearly three in four adolescents (72.1%) report watching the television news with relative frequency.

Figure 1.2

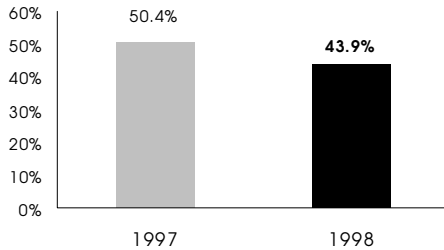
Viewing Television News 1996-1998 (percent viewing at least three times per week)



While television news viewing has remained constant or increased, subscriptions to daily newspapers in the home are down from 1997. Half (50.4%) of households with children had subscriptions to newspapers in 1997, but this number dropped to 43.9% in 1998.

Figure 1.3

Subscriptions to Daily Newspaper in Homes with Children 1997-1998

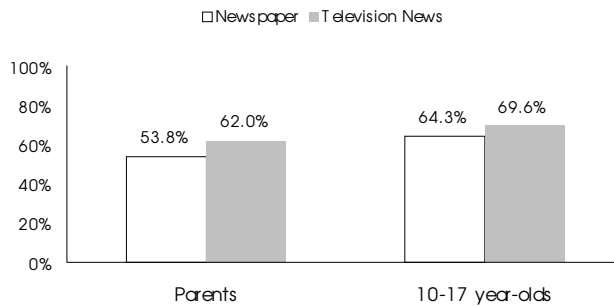


[Figure 1.3 note: Parents were not asked this question in 1996.]

This year's survey measured the level of trust in newspapers and television news among parents and young people. The majority of both parents and 10-17 year-olds believe "most" or "all" of what they read in the newspaper or see on the television news. The data indicate that parents, and to a lesser extent 10-17 year-olds, trust television news more than that in newspapers. Young people are more trusting of both sources of news than parents.

Figure 1.4

Trust in News Sources (percent believing "most" or "all" of what they read in newspapers or see on television news)



2

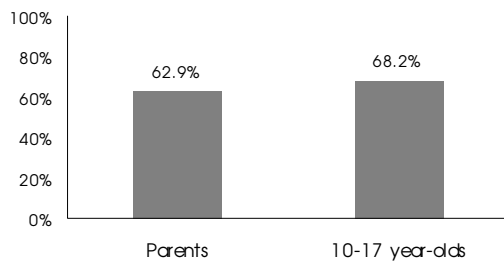
We asked parents and children to assess two issues related to diversity on television: first, TV's *inclusion* of different races, women and girls; and secondly, TV's *portrayal* of those groups. Both parents and children generally give TV high marks in these areas. The data show that both parents and young people believe television does a better job of *including* various races, women and girls than it does *portraying* these groups. Another clear result shows parents are less optimistic than the young people interviewed about television's ability to include and portray race and gender groups.

Diversity on Television

A majority of parents (62.9%) says there are either "some" or "a lot" of television characters to which their child can relate. Ten to seventeen year-olds, in even greater numbers, say there are "some" or "a lot of characters they can relate to (68.2%).

Figure 2.1

Characters Children Can Relate To (parents perceiving "some" or "a lot" of characters their children can relate to; 10-17 year-olds perceiving "some" or "a lot" of characters they themselves can relate to)

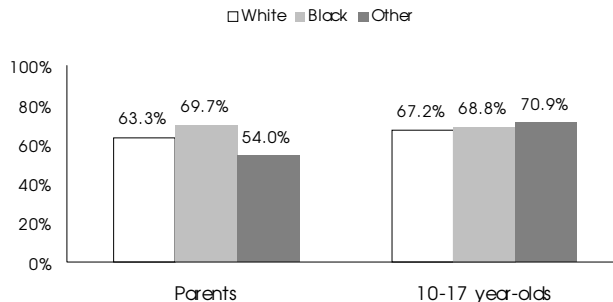


Parents of different races vary in their perception of the presence of characters on TV their children can relate to. Parents in African-American households tend to be more satisfied with the number of television characters their children can relate to than are other racial minorities. White (63.3%) and black (69.7%) respondents were more likely to say there were "some" or "a lot" of characters than were other racial groups, including those of Hispanic and Asian backgrounds (54.0%).

Children of different races did not show the same variation in perception as parents. Of the 10-17 year-olds interviewed, whites (67.2%), blacks (68.8%) and other racial minorities (70.9%) were all equally likely to say there were "some" or "a lot" of characters to which they could relate.

Figure 2.2

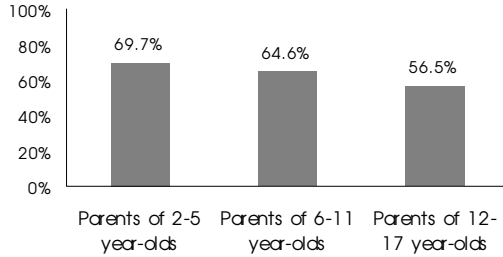
Characters Children Can Relate To by Respondent's Race (percent perceiving "some" or "a lot" of characters child can relate to)



Parents of older children are less likely to say television provides “some” or “a lot” of characters with which their children can identify. Parents of preschoolers (2-5 years) say there are the greatest number of characters on TV for their children (69.7% “some” or “a lot”). This figure drops to 64.6% among parents of elementary school-aged children (6-11 years) and then decreases significantly to 56.5% among parents of adolescents (12-17 years).

Figure 2.3

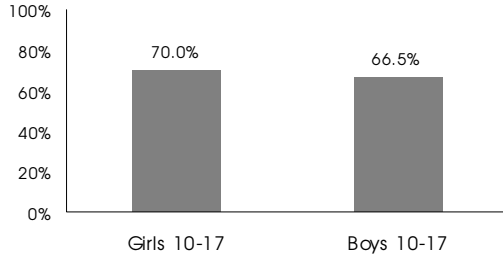
Characters Children Can Relate To
(by age of child – parents perceiving “some” or “a lot” of characters their children can relate to)



Boys and girls 10-17 years-old are equally likely to say that television has “some” or “a lot” of characters they can relate to – 70.0% of girls and 66.5% of boys. There was also no difference among children of different ages on this measure.

Figure 2.4

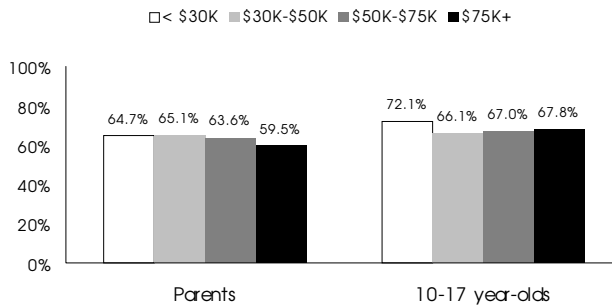
Characters Boys and Girls Can Relate To
(percent of 10-17 year-old boys and girls perceiving “some” or “a lot” of characters they can relate to)



The data from both parents and children suggest that socioeconomic status is not significantly related to perception of the number of characters on TV to which the child can relate. Parents and children in lower income households are just as likely as those in higher income families to say that there are “some” or “a lot” of characters.

Figure 2.5

Characters Children Can Relate To by Household Income
(percent perceiving “some” or “a lot” of characters child can relate to)

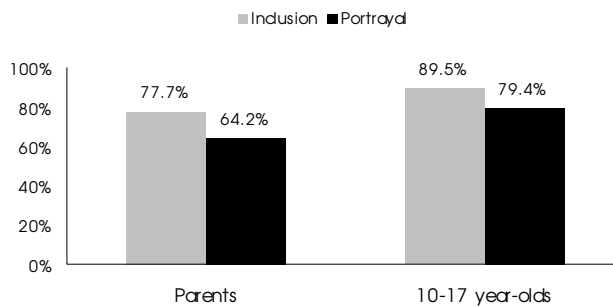


Racial Inclusion and Portrayal

Parents and children give television favorable ratings for including and portraying people of different races and backgrounds in its programs. Young people 10-17 are noticeably more optimistic on these measures than are parents. When asked how good or bad a job television shows do of *including* people of different races and backgrounds, over three in four parents of 2-17 year-olds (77.7%) said a “pretty good” or “very good job.” Nine in ten 10-17 year-olds (89.5%) said television does a “pretty good” or “very good job.” Six in ten parents (64.2%) say television does a “pretty good” or “very good job” of *portraying* people of different races and backgrounds, compared to eight in ten of the 10-17 year-olds interviewed (79.4%). What is also notable about these results is that parents and children believe television does not do as good a job *portraying* racial groups as it does of simply *including* diverse racial populations.

Figure 2.6

Perceived Inclusion and Portrayal of Racial Groups on Television (percent of parents and 10-17 year-olds saying TV does a “pretty good” or “very good job”)



Perceptions of racial inclusion and portrayal differ across racial groups of parents, but not children. By significant margins, parents of color gave television lower marks for racial inclusion and portrayal than did white parents.

Figure 2.7

Perceived Racial *Inclusion* by Race of Respondent (percent saying TV does a “pretty good” or “very good job”)

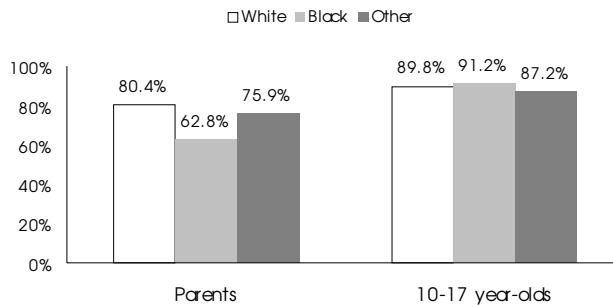
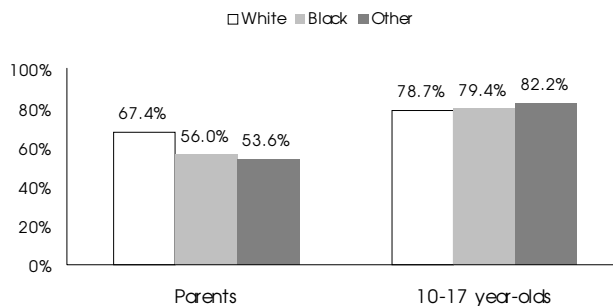


Figure 2.8

Perceived Racial *Portrayal* by Race of Respondent (percent saying TV does a “pretty good” or “very good job”)



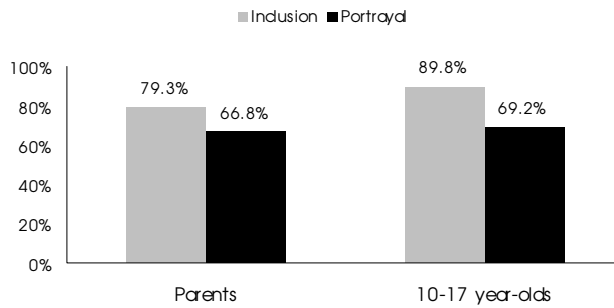
[Note: For analyses by race, Hispanic and Asian respondents are included in the “other” category.]

Inclusion and Portrayal of Women and Girls

Parents and children also say television programs do a good job of including and portraying women and girls. Eight in ten parents (79.3%) said TV shows do a “pretty good” or “very good job” of *including* women and girls as characters, and two-thirds (66.8%) said shows do a “pretty good” or “very good job” *portraying* them. Nine in ten young people (89.8%) said TV shows do a “pretty good” or “very good job” of *including* women and girls, and seven in ten (69.2%) said they do a “pretty good” or “very good job” of *portraying* those characters. As was the case with their judgement of racial representations on television, parents were less enthusiastic about television’s depiction of women and girls than the 10-17 year-olds surveyed, and all respondents tended to be more satisfied with TV’s *inclusion* of women and girls than its *portrayal* of them.

Figure 2.9

Perceived Inclusion and Portrayal of Women and Girls
(percent saying TV does a “pretty good” or “very good job”)



Male and female parents do not differ significantly in their opinions of gender representation on television. Similarly, among 10-17 year-olds, boys and girls do not differ in their perception of television’s inclusion and portrayal of women and girls.

Figure 2.10

Perceived Inclusion and Portrayal of Women and Girls by Parent’s Gender
(percent of parents saying TV does a “pretty good” or “very good job”)

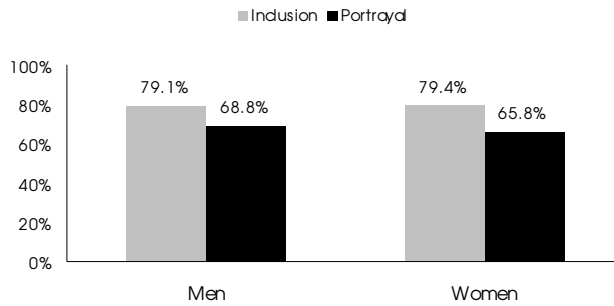
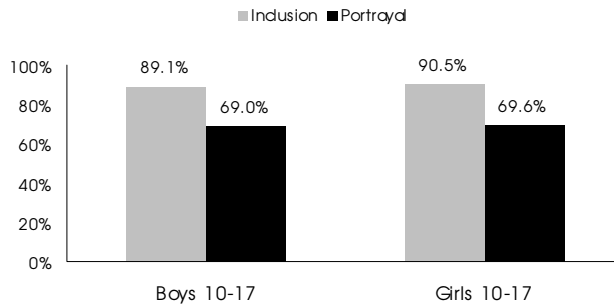


Figure 2.11

Perceived Inclusion and Portrayal of Women and Girls by Child’s Gender
(percent of 10-17 year-olds saying TV does a “pretty good” or “very good job”)



3

New Media in the Home

Computer and online technologies are the only media that show increased penetration in homes with children over the past three years. Penetration of computers reached 61.5% of households in 1998, up from 55.0% in 1997 and 48.0% in 1996. Internet or online services reached nearly one-third of all households with children in 1998 (32.2%), up significantly from 1997 (22.0%) and more than doubling from 1996 (15.0%). While computer and online technology adoption is on the rise, cable/pay television, premium channels (i.e., HBO, Showtime), video game equipment and VCRs are static, and as noted in Section 1 of this report, newspaper subscriptions have decreased.

Figure 3.1

Computer and Online Access Penetration 1996-1998 (percent of households with children 2-17)

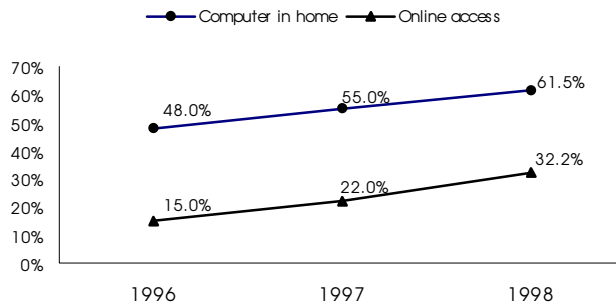
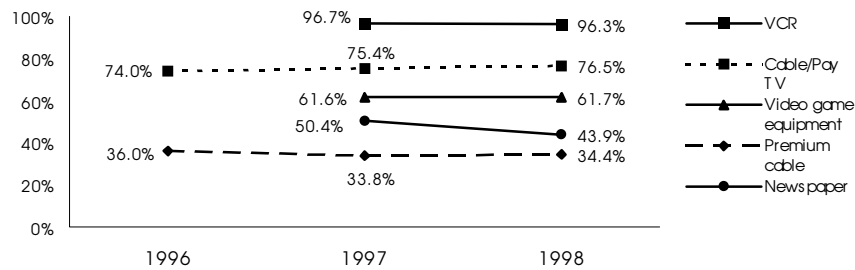


Figure 3.2

Penetration of Other Media 1996-1998 (percent of households with children 2-17)



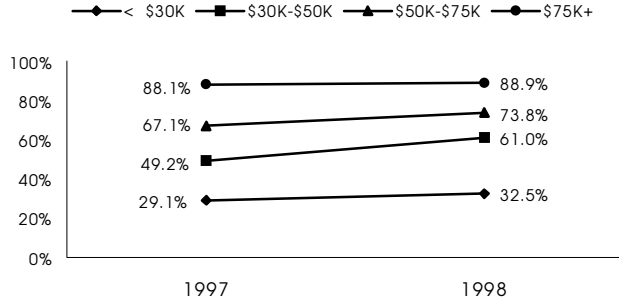
[Figure 3.2 note: VCR, video game equipment and newspaper subscriptions were not measured in 1996.]

Who is being left off the information superhighway? Not surprisingly, adoption of information technologies in the home lags among lower income families. Fewer than one-third (32.5%) of families with annual household incomes below \$30,000 report having a home computer in 1998, roughly half of the penetration rate in the next highest income category, those between \$30,000 and \$50,000 (61.0%). There was no statistical difference between 1997 (29.1%) and 1998 (32.5%) in computer penetration in this lowest income category. The bulk of the growth in home computers has occurred in middle income households. The figure below shows that the gap between the lowest income families with children and middle income households grew larger between 1997 and this year.

Note also that between 1997 and 1998 there was little growth in upper income households, which is best explained by the fact that home computers were already nearly as common as VCRs by 1997 (88.1%) in households with annual incomes above \$75,000.

Figure 3.3

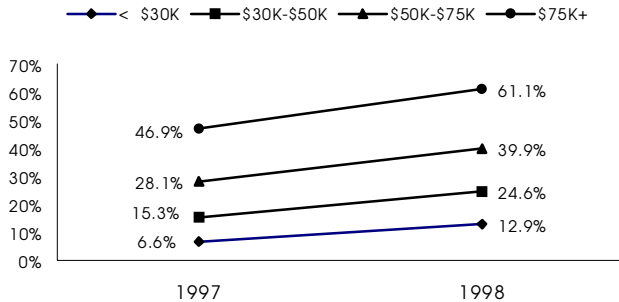
Computer Penetration by Annual Household Income 1997-1998 (percent of households with children 2-17)



Just over one in ten households with children with annual incomes under \$30,000 reported having online access in the home in 1998 (12.9%). By contrast, six in ten (61.1%) households with incomes over \$75,000 have a subscription to an Internet or online service. Online access is up significantly among all income categories from 1997, but is growing more rapidly among higher income families.

Figure 3.4

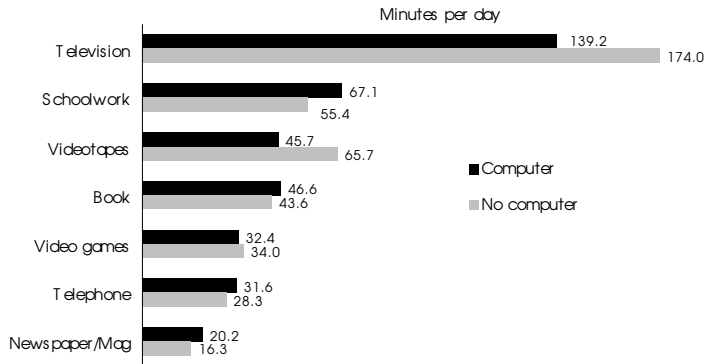
Households with Online Access by Annual Income 1997-1998 (percent of households with children 2-17)



Children in homes with computers spend 40 minutes on average per day on those computers, according to their parents. (See Section 5 for average time spent on all of the activities we measured.) The data show that children in households with computers spend less time in front of the television than children without. Children with computers spend 2.3 hours watching television on a typical day. Those without watch TV an average of 2.9 hours. Children with computers also spend significantly less time watching videotapes compared to children without. Children with home computers actually report spending more time doing schoolwork and reading magazines or newspapers. Having a computer is not related to the time children spend playing video games or reading books.

Figure 3.5

Children's Activities in Homes with and without Computers (in minutes spent per day, as reported by parents)



[Figure 3.5 note: Test for differences in means – television viewing (t=-8.162, p<.001); doing schoolwork (t=3.316, p<.01); watching videotapes (t=-4.881, p<.001); reading a book (t=1.332, p=.18); playing video games (t=-.583, p=.56); talking on the telephone (t=1.196, p=.23); reading a newspaper or magazine (t=2.280, p<.05).]

As noted above, higher household income is positively associated with computer ownership ($r=.40, p<.001$). It is also associated with reports of less television viewing by children in the household ($r=-.21, p<.001$). Similarly, the education level of the parent is associated with computer ownership ($r=.32, p<.001$) and lower reported television viewing by the children ($r=-.17, p<.001$). Therefore, it is possible that the observed relationship between having a computer in the household and less TV viewing by the child ($r=-.17, p<.001$ at the bivariate level; difference in means detailed above) is entirely due to differences in the income and education level of the parents. Controlling for these factors simultaneously, the relationship between computer ownership and less TV viewing by the child remained significant, however it was noticeably weaker ($r=-.08, p<.001$).²

This result suggests that the relationship between having a computer in the household and less television viewing by the child is partially due to the relationship of the parent's income and education level with both variables. However, there is still some evidence that having a home computer may affect the amount of television children watch in those households.

² r = Pearson correlation coefficient, a measure of association between variables.

4

Opinion of Kids' TV 1996-1998

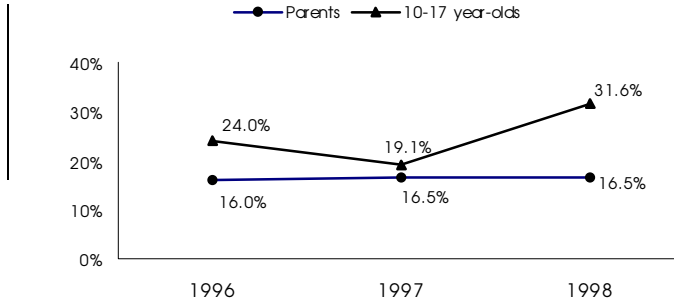
Our three years of surveys enable us to develop trends in opinion and media behavior among both parents and children.

From 1996 to 1998, parents' opinion of the quality of television available for children has remained low, with no noticeable change over time, despite changes in programming and regulation over that same period. In each of the three years, only 16 percent of parents of children 2-17 reported "mainly" or "very positive" opinions about the quality of television for their children. About three in ten each year held a "mainly" or "very negative" opinion of television for children.

Children 10-17 show more fluctuation in opinion, and a generally higher opinion than parents. After dipping to a low-point of 19.1% "mainly positive" or "very positive" opinion in 1997, the opinion of 10-17 year-olds rebounded to post a three-year high of 31.6% "mainly positive" or "very positive" in 1998.

Figure 4.1

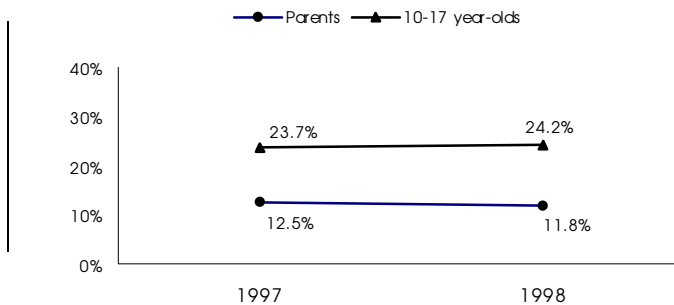
Opinion of Children's Television (percent "mainly" or "very positive")



Despite a recent effort to increase the amount of quality television for children, we have yet to see it reflected in parents' and children's opinions of how much good programming exists for young people. The proportion of parents and children reporting there are "a lot" of good programs for young people remained constant from 1997. Just over one in ten parents and one quarter of 10-17 year olds believe there are a lot of good programs for kids.

Figure 4.2

Perceived Amount of Good Television for Young People 1997-1998 (percent "a lot")



For the first time in the three years of the survey, the greatest proportion of young people 10-17 said the best programming for young people could be found on the commercial broadcast networks rather than cable or public television. This was a major turn-around from 1997, when broadcast networks were least likely to be named by young people as the place to go for good children's television.

Parents still believe that public television is the most likely to offer the best programs for their children, but by a smaller margin than in past years. There was a modest improvement in the opinion of broadcast networks and cable, while the proportion of parents reporting that public broadcasting offers the best programs slipped significantly from previous years.

Figure 4.3
Where Parents Believe Best Programs for Young People Can Be Found 1996-1998

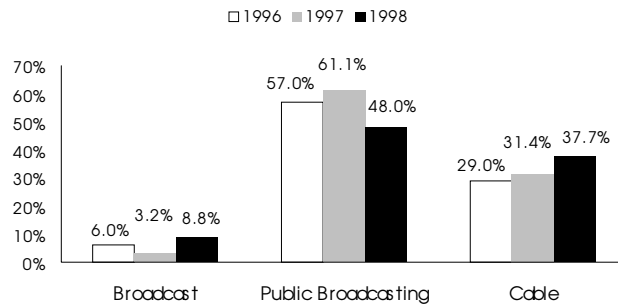
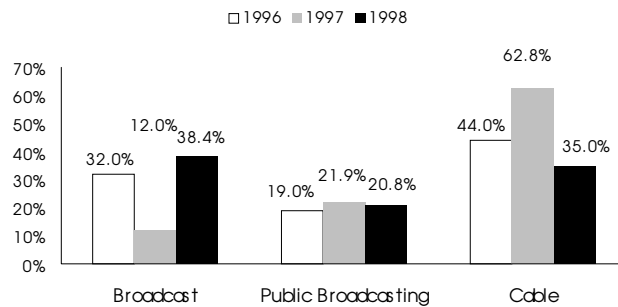
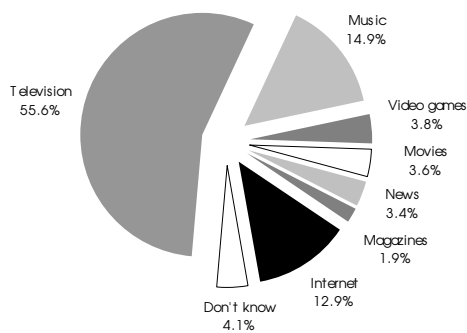


Figure 4.4
Where 10-17 year-olds Believe Best Programs Can Be Found 1996-1998



As in 1996 and 1997, parents are still most concerned with what kids can see on television compared to other possible media influences. What kids can see on the Internet was added to the survey this year, and 12.9% of parents reported it as their biggest concern, which ranked behind only television (55.6%) and music lyrics (14.9%). In 1996, 61.0% of parents said the influence of television was of most concern, and in 1997, 58.6% reported it as their biggest concern.

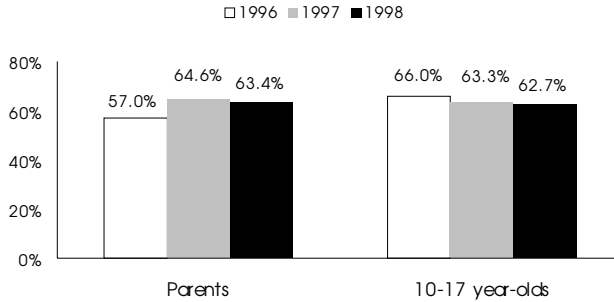
Figure 4.5
Media Influence of Most Concern to Parents 1998



Parents and children alike continue to say that television has done more good than harm. Roughly six in ten parents and children in all three years of the survey believe television has more positive effects than harmful ones.

Figure 4.6

Possible Effect of TV on Kids 1996-1998 (percent "more good than harm")



Parents and children also continue to give television relatively high marks for its ability to educate young people, however these numbers are down slightly across all categories in 1998. As in 1997, respondents say television is more successful at teaching pro-social lessons such as sharing and cooperation than it is at imparting academic skills such as reading, writing and math.

Figure 4.7

Parents' Perceived Learning by their Child 1997-1998 (percent "some" or "a lot")

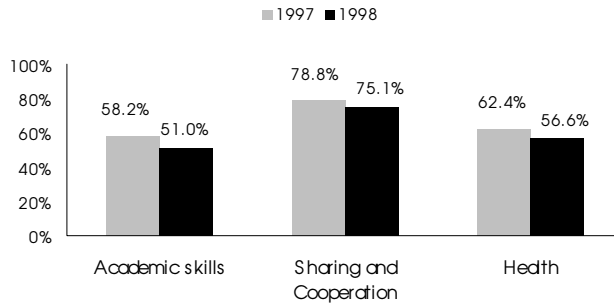
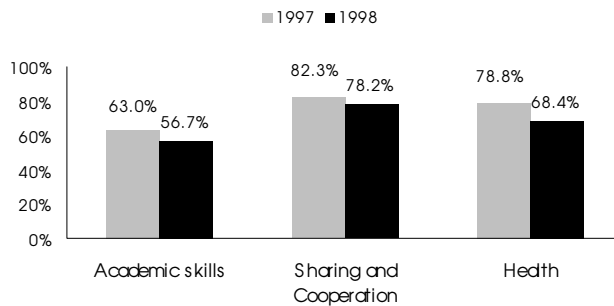


Figure 4.8

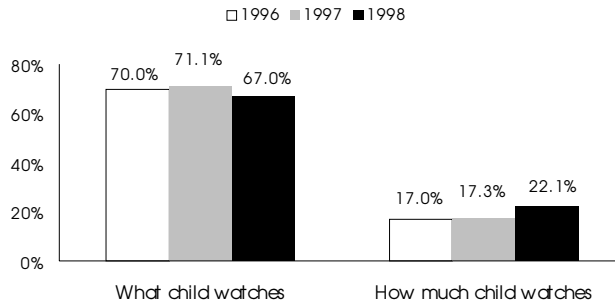
10-17 year-olds' Perceived Learning from Television 1997-1998 (percent "some" or "a lot")



Parents are still more concerned with *what* their children watch than *how much* they watch. The data show a modest increase in 1998 in the proportion of parents concerned with how much television their children watch.

Figure 4.9

What Concerns Parents More – What Child Watches or How Much 1996-1998



Public broadcasting and cable programs continue to top the list of what parents believe are good shows for their children. Barney and Sesame Street swapped the top two spots from 1997. Arthur debuted on the list of top shows at #4.

Figure 4.10

Best Shows for Kids, According to Parents 1997-1998 (percent of all parents of 2-17 year-olds; allowed multiple responses)

| 1998 Program | 1997 Program |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Barney 19 | Sesame Street 21 |
| Sesame Street 17 | Barney 20 |
| Rugrats 9 | Magic Schoolbus 6 |
| Arthur 8 | Home Improvement 6 |
| Blues Clues 8 | Family Matters 6 |
| Magic Schoolbus 7 | Bill Nye, The Science Guy 5 |
| Home Improvement 6 | Gullah Gullah Island 5 |
| Discovery Channel 5 | Rugrats 5 |
| Touched by an Angel 4 | Blues Clues 5 |
| Saved by the Bell 4 | National Geographic 5 |
| Sabrina 4 | |
| Bill Nye, The Science Guy 4 | |

Figure 4.10 reports the responses of all parents, including those of younger children. Figure 4.11 below shows only the responses of parents of 10-17 year olds, in order to more accurately compare these responses to the sample of 10-17 year-olds. Parents of 10-17 year-olds and adolescents 10-17 have very different opinions of what constitutes good programming for that age group.

Figure 4.11

| | Parents of 10-17 yr-olds | | 10-17 year-olds | |
|--|--------------------------|---|-------------------|----|
| Best Programs for 10-17 year-olds, According to Parents and Kids (allowed multiple responses) | Home Improvement | 9 | The Simpsons | 15 |
| | Saved by the Bell | 8 | Home Improvement | 12 |
| | Discovery Channel | 7 | Saved by the Bell | 8 |
| | Touched by an Angel | 6 | Rugrats | 7 |
| | Sabrina | 6 | Seinfeld | 7 |
| | Seventh Heaven | 5 | Boy Meets World | 7 |
| | Boy Meets World | 5 | Dawson's Creek | 7 |
| | National Geographic | 4 | South Park | 7 |
| | Family Matters | 4 | Sabrina | 6 |
| | Rugrats | 4 | Seventh Heaven | 5 |
| | | | Friends | 5 |
| | | | X-Files | 5 |

The Simpsons and the cable program South Park moved to the top of the list of favorite programs of 10-17 year-olds in 1998. Seinfeld dropped from the top spot, while Family Matters and Martin also dropped out of the top five.

Figure 4.12

| | 1998 Favorite Program | | 1997 Favorite Program | |
|--|---------------------------|----------|---------------------------|----------|
| Favorite Shows of 10-17 year-olds 1997-1998 (allowed one response) | The Simpsons | 8 | Seinfeld | 7 |
| | South Park | 8 | Home Improvement | 4 |
| | Home Improvement | 3 | Family Matters | 4 |
| | Rugrats | 3 | The Simpsons | 3 |
| | Wrestling | 3 | Martin | 3 |
| | Dawson's Creek | 3 | | |
| | 11 shows tied with | 2 | 11 shows tied with | 2 |

5

Television in the Home 1996-1998

While the previous section dealt with parents' and children's opinions of television programming, this one addresses the presence of television in the home, its use by children and adults, and parental involvement in their child's viewing. It also shows the trends in these areas across the three years of the survey.

Television sets continue to proliferate. The proportion of households with more than one is now 82.6%, the highest measurement of the past three years.³ The average number of television sets in a household with children is now 2.7, compared to 2.5 in 1997 and 2.4 in 1996.

Figure 5.1

Household with Two of More Television Sets 1996-1998

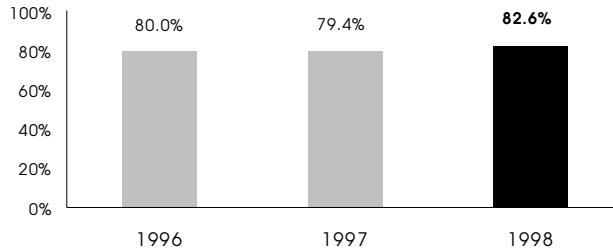


Figure 5.2

Average Number of Television Sets in Households with Children 1996-1998

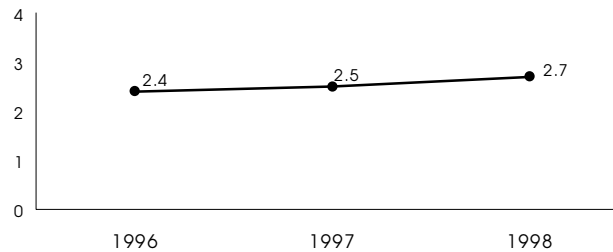
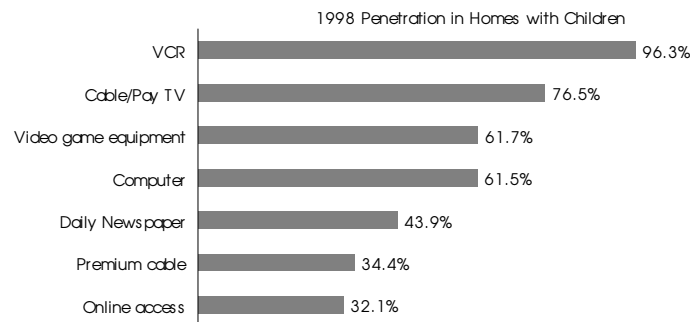


Figure 5.3

Penetration of Other Media 1998



The proportion of households in which the child has a television set in his/her bedroom has reached 42.3%. Nearly six in ten adolescents 12-17 now have their own television sets (57.7%). For the first time, more than three in ten children of preschool age (2-5) have a set in their bedrooms (31.2%).

³ The differences among the three years are within the margins of error of the three parent surveys ($\pm 3\%$).

Figure 5.4

Proportion of Children with TV Sets in Bedroom 1996-1998

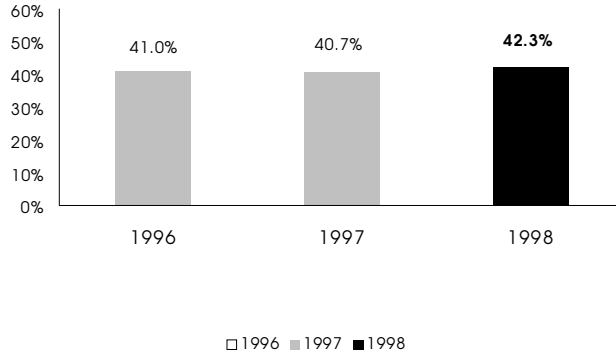
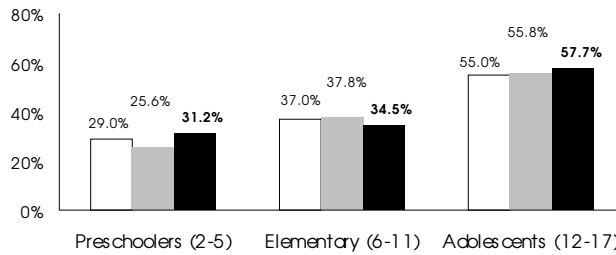


Figure 5.5

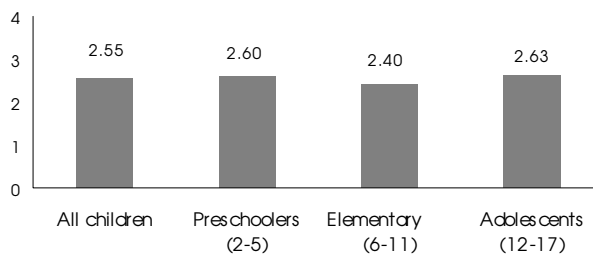
Children with TV Sets in Bedroom by Age 1996-1998



Children watch an average of 2.55 hours of television on a typical day. Television viewing drops slightly in the elementary years, then resumes in adolescence.

Figure 5.6

Television Viewing by Children 1998 (in hours, as reported by parents)

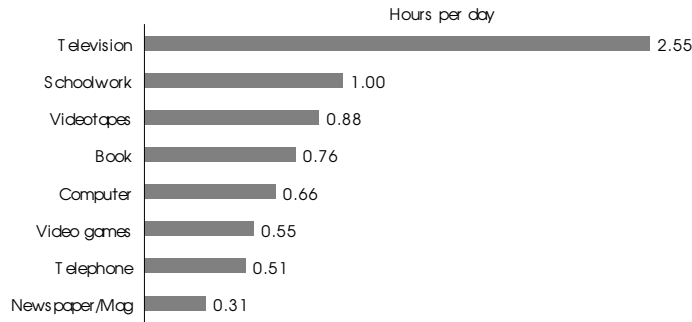


Parents report watching less television than their children do, only 2.3 hours per day on average.

Watching television is still the most common activity by children in the home, surpassing schoolwork, computer use (in households with computers), reading books, newspapers and magazines, playing video games, and talking on the telephone. Children spend more than twice as much time watching television than they do on schoolwork. Add the time children spend watching videotapes, and the total number of hours spent in front of the television screen in a typical day is nearly 3.5 hours.

Figure 5.7

TV Viewing Compared to Other Activities 1998
(in hours, as reported by parents)



Parents continue to report being active participants in their children’s television experience, through co-viewing or supervision of viewing. In each of the three years, nine in ten parents say they sit down with their children while they are watching television “almost always” or “once in awhile.” Supervision of television viewing by parents remains high – 61.8% of parents say they provide a “great deal” of supervision over their children’s television viewing, compared to 65.9% in 1997 and 66.0% in 1996.

Figure 5.8

Co-viewing by Parents 1996-1998
(percent of parents reporting “almost always” or “once in awhile” viewing with child)

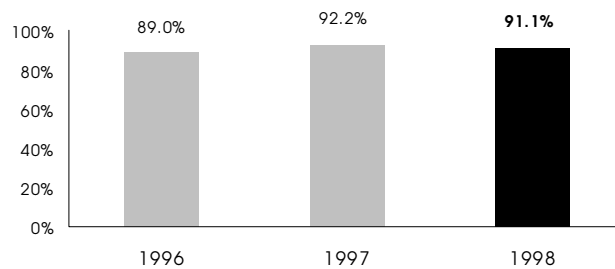
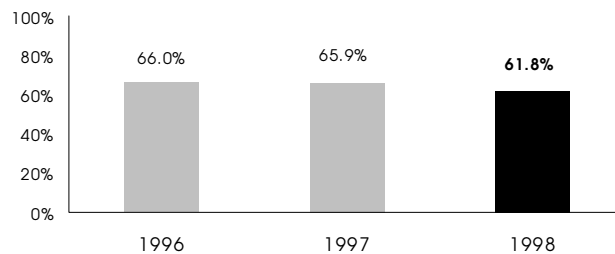


Figure 5.9

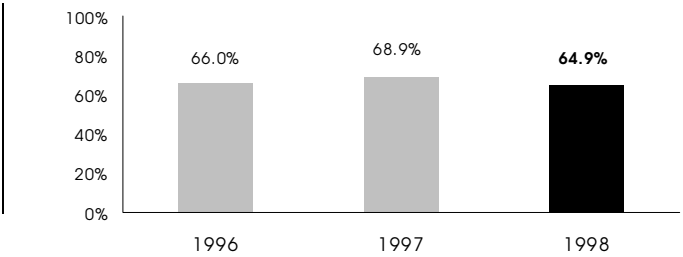
Supervision of Child’s Viewing 1996-1998
(percent of parents reporting “a great deal” of supervision)



As in previous years, two-thirds of parents say they have established rules in their households governing their child's television viewing.

Figure 5.10

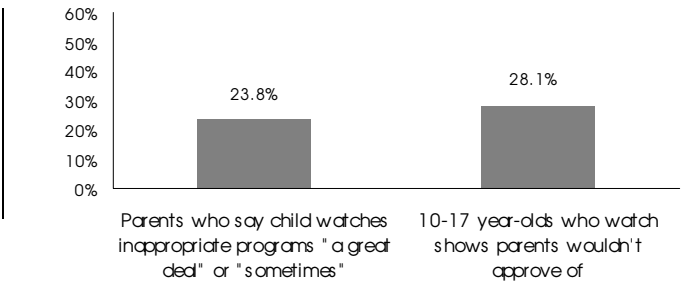
Households with Rules About Watching TV 1996-1998



One in four parents (23.8%) say their child watches inappropriate programs “a great deal” or “sometimes.” A similar proportion of young people 10-17 say they watch programs that their parents would not approve of (28.1%). These numbers are similar to past years.

Figure 5.11

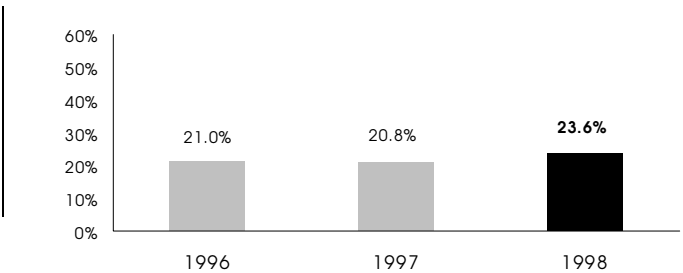
Viewing of Inappropriate Programs 1998



Consistent with the earlier finding that parents are more concerned with *what* their child watches than *how much*, only about one in four parents (23.6%) believes their children spend too much time watching television.

Figure 5.12

Parents Who Think Their Child Watches Too Much TV 1996-1998



The proportion of 10-17 year-olds that report watching cartoons or kids' shows fell significantly from 1996 and 1997 to just over half in 1998 (55.1%), as did viewing of TV talk shows. However, 10-17 year-olds report watching more tabloid news shows such as *Hard Copy* and *Inside Edition*, as well as more national news programs. There was a drop in the percentage of parents reporting they watch tabloid news, while viewership of other genres by parents has remained constant over the three years. As in past years, 10-17 year-olds are less likely to watch the news and PBS than parents, but for the first time in 1998 are more likely than parents to watch tabloid news shows.

Figure 5.13

What 10-17 year-olds are Watching 1996-1998

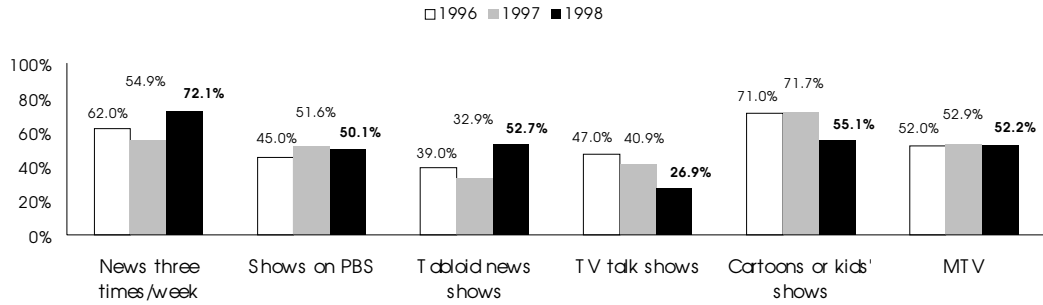
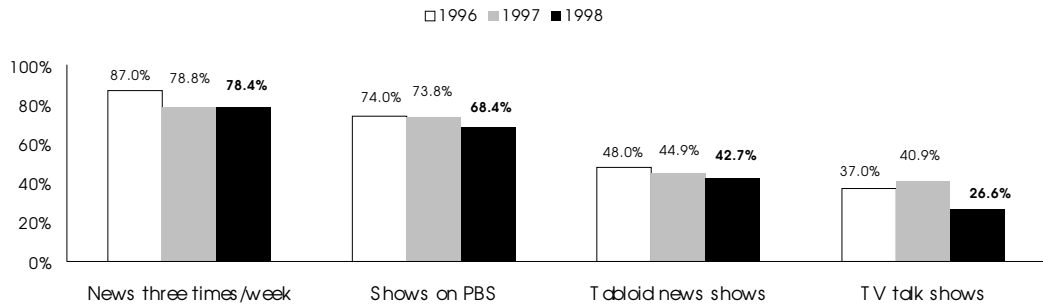


Figure 5.14

What Parents are Watching 1996-1998



[Figure 5.12, 5.13 note: only 10-17 year-olds were asked if they watch cartoons, kids' shows or MTV.]

The Jerry Springer Show topped this year's list of programs young people say their parents prohibit them from watching. Interestingly, South Park and Simpsons, the two favorite shows of 10-17 year-olds (see Section 4), rank second and third respectively among shows prohibited by parents. As in 1997, 10-17 year-olds say their parents most often encourage them to watch news programming.

Figure 5.15

Programs Prohibited by Parents, According to Their Kids 1997-1998

| 1998 Top Prohibited Programs | | 1997 Top Prohibited Programs | |
|--------------------------------|-----------|------------------------------|----|
| The Jerry Springer Show | 18 | Beavis and Butthead | 21 |
| South Park | 15 | The Simpsons | 9 |
| The Simpsons | 14 | MTV Network | 8 |
| Beavis and Butthead | 14 | X-Files | 6 |
| King of the Hill | 4 | Melrose Place | 5 |

Figure 5.16

Programs Encouraged by Parents, According to Their Kids 1997-1998

| 1998 Top Encouraged Programs | | 1997 Top Encouraged Programs | |
|----------------------------------|-----------|------------------------------|----|
| News (any) | 24 | News (any) | 17 |
| Discovery Channel | 12 | Discovery Channel | 8 |
| Touched by an Angel | 5 | National Geographic | 5 |
| Seventh Heaven | 5 | Bill Nye, The Science Guy | 5 |
| Bill Nye, The Science Guy | 3 | Touched by an Angel | 5 |
| Rugrats | 3 | | |
| Disney programs | 3 | | |
| Family Matters | 3 | | |

Current FCC regulations require commercial broadcast stations to provide newspapers with information about core educational programming. Previous Annenberg research has shown that there is little, if any, coverage of children’s television in most local newspapers.⁴ This year’s survey shows that parents still do not use their daily newspaper as a major source of information about children’s television. Similar to 1997, only one in ten parents (9.5%) says he/she uses the newspaper most frequently for information about the shows their children watch. Despite the FCC requirement, newspapers have not improved as a source for such information, according to parents. In fact, only 38.0% said their local newspaper was “very” or “somewhat helpful” in providing information about programming for children, a slight decrease from 1997 when 41.4% rated their newspaper as “very” or “somewhat helpful.”

Figure 5.17

Source Parents Use Most for Information About Children’s Television 1998

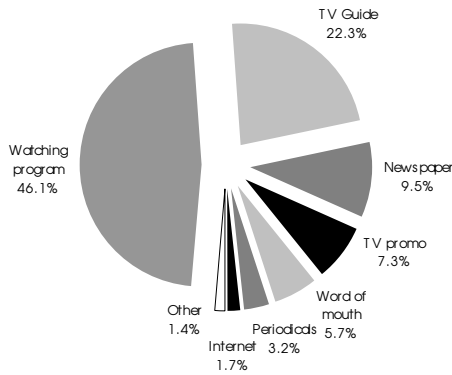
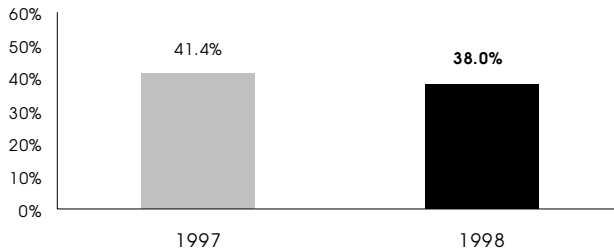


Figure 5.18

Helpfulness of Local Newspaper in Providing Information About Children’s TV 1997-1998 (percent of parents saying “somewhat” or “very helpful”)



⁴ See *Newspaper Coverage of Children’s Television* (Annenberg Report No. 7, 1996) and *Newspaper Coverage of Children’s Television: A 1997 Update* (Annenberg Report No. 12, 1997).

6

Ratings, E/I and the V-Chip

This marks the second year the Annenberg Public Policy Center has polled parents and young people about their awareness, knowledge and use of on-screen information provided by broadcasters, including programs ratings and the educational/informational designation (E/I). In 1997, most parents and children knew of the existence of ratings and the E/I symbol. However, it was found that neither was knowledgeable about the symbols' meaning. We found that only a third of parents were using the ratings to guide their child's viewing, and virtually no parents were using the E/I designation.

A year later, we find that awareness of on-screen information about shows, although still relatively high, has waned somewhat among parents of 2-17 year-olds and young people. It should be noted that the differences between 1997 and 1998 are within the margins of error.

Figure 6.1

Awareness of TV Ratings System 1997-1998
(percent aware of on-screen information about appropriateness of programs for people of different ages)

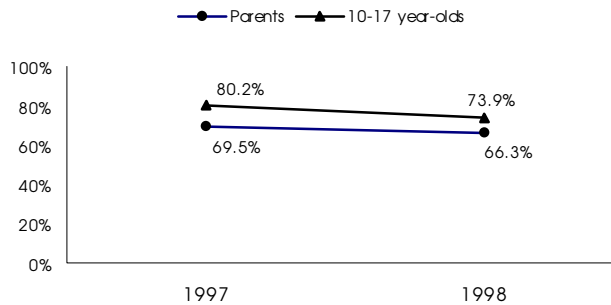
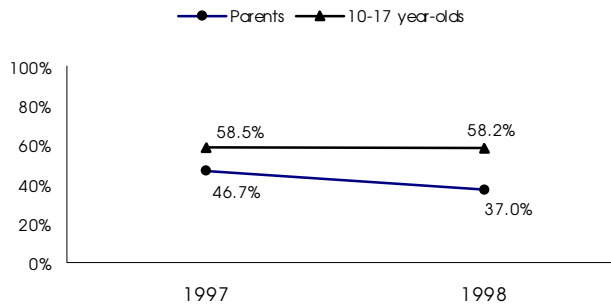


Figure 6.2

Awareness of Educational or Informational Designation 1997-1998
(percent aware of on-screen information about which shows are educational for children)

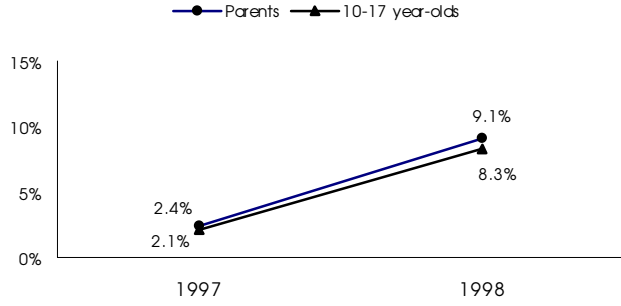


Knowledge of what the E/I symbol means (i.e., educational or informational programming for children) was disturbingly low in 1997 (2.4% of parents, 2.1% of children), shortly after it's implementation. Despite the apparent decline in parents and young people's awareness of the E/I designator, knowledge of what it means, while still very low, has increased. In this year's survey, close to one in ten parents and children correctly identified the E/I symbol as meaning educational or informational programming.⁵

⁵ Like 1997, respondents needed only to mention either "educational" or "informational," or some form thereof, to be given credit for a correct response.

Figure 6.3

Knowledge of What E/I Means 1997-1998 (percent correctly answering "educational" or "informational")

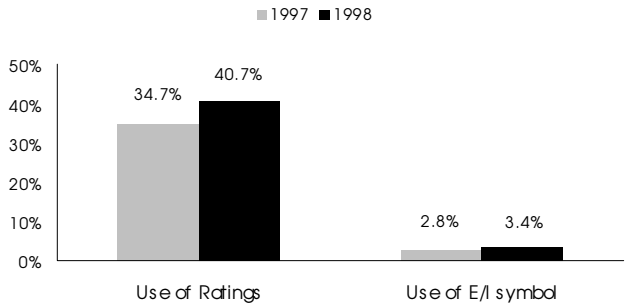


Parents' use of the rating system to guide their child's viewing is up from 1997. Last year, one in three parents said they were using the ratings to direct their child's viewing, but this number has grown to two in five in 1998 (40.7%).

Unlike the rise in use of TV ratings from last year, very few parents report using the E/I designation to guide their child's viewing. This year, only 3.4% of parents said they used the symbol – statistically equivalent to last year's 2.8%.

Figure 6.4

Use of Ratings and E/I Symbol by Parents to Guide Child's Viewing 1997-1998 (percent of parents using)



For the first time in 1998, the Annenberg Public Policy Center asked young people if they used the TV ratings when selecting programs to watch. Nearly one in three said they did take the ratings into consideration when choosing shows (32.6%).

The 1997 survey found no evidence to support the contention that children would turn away from programs clearly labeled as educational. Rather parents and children reported that such a label might in fact attract young viewers. This year's survey shows a growth in indifference about such a label. There were significant increases in the proportion of parents who said knowing a program was labeled "educational" or "informational" would *make no difference* in their child's likelihood of viewing the program. There was a similar increase among children that knowing a show was labeled E/I would make no difference in their likelihood of viewing it.

Figure 6.5

E/I Symbol's Effect on Child's Likelihood of Viewing, According to Parents 1997-1998

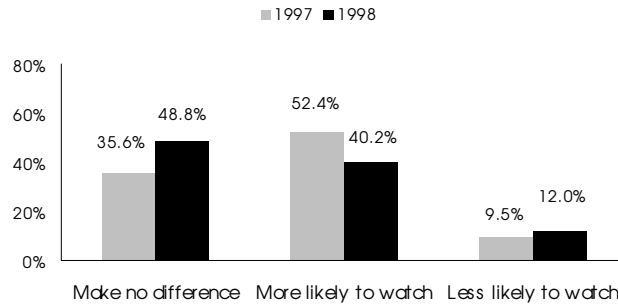
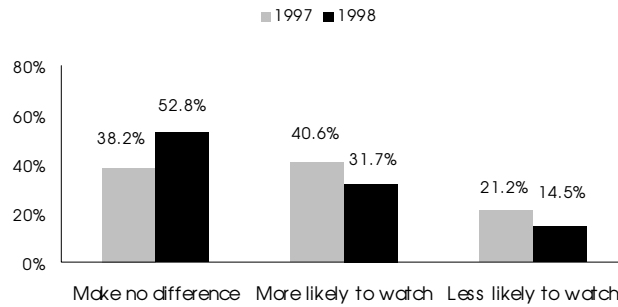


Figure 6.6

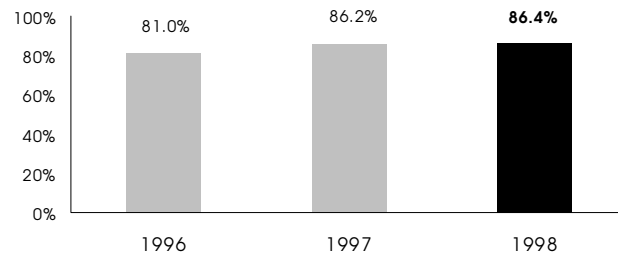
E/I Symbol's Effect on Child's Likelihood of Viewing, According to Parents 1997-1998



The Annenberg Public Policy Center has tracked support among parents for the impending implementation of the V-chip technology over the three years of the Television in the Home survey. The technology, due in television sets in 1999, still enjoys significant support among parents.

Figure 6.7

Support for V-Chip Among Parents of 2-17 year-olds 1996-1998



A majority of parents said if they had a V-chip, they would use it “often.” Only one in ten parents said they would never use the technology if available.

Figure 6.8

Projected Use
of V-Chip by
Parents
1998

