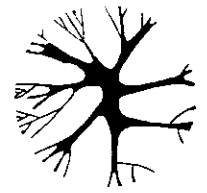


COMMUNICATION RESEARCH TRENDS



A Quarterly Information Service from the
Centre for the Study of Communication and Culture

Vol 5 (1984), No. 3

Television Viewing and Family Communication

Over the past thirty years a host of research studies has sought to determine just what are the effects of television viewing on social behaviour. In particular, study after study has attempted to establish once and for all whether or not the watching of violent programmes by children and adolescents is a direct cause of later aggressive behaviour.

Yet today all that these studies can tell us for certain is that "for *some* children, under *some* conditions, *some* television is harmful" and that "for *most* children, under *most* conditions, *most* television is probably neither harmful nor particularly beneficial." And we still know very little about how *families*, as distinct from *individual* family members, interact with and use television in their everyday life.

As long ago as 1972 the US Surgeon General's Advisory Committee Report on Television and Social Behavior requested that television be studied in the home environment. Ten years later the update of the Surgeon General's Report, *Television and Behavior*, called once again for more studies on family interaction with television, and for a research approach which uses the family or the peer group as the unit of analysis.

This issue of TRENDS examines some recent research which has attempted to respond to the concerns raised by the Surgeon General's Report. The first section discusses research which builds up social learning, and uses and gratifications theories to explore how the family acts as a mediator of television's effects. The second section surveys recent work on the relationship between television portrayal of family life and family communication patterns. The third section examines some of the newer theories and methods which have been devised to explain how families use television. The last section offers a brief introduction to research on the interaction of families with the video cassette recorder.

I: Mediating the Effects of Television: The Role of the Family

Since the early 1970s researchers have become increasingly interested in the way in which the effects of television viewing can be mediated by family background and family communication patterns. The following report of research by Brown and Linné, Jerome and Dorothy Singer and Wanda Rapaczynski, McLeod and Brown, and Hedinsson and Johnsson-Smaragdi, illustrates the variety of approaches adopted by researchers who have treated the family as an 'intervening variable' between television and its users.

Mothers and Children: Use of and Attitudes to TV

J.R. Brown and O. Linné, 'The Family as a Mediator of Television's Effects,' in *Children and Television*, ed. Ray Brown. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1976, pp.184-198.

Brown and Linné report on studies of children and television in England and Sweden which take as their starting point a stimulus-intervening variable-response model of the television effects process. In this model television is the stimulus, the family is a complex of intervening variables (e.g. parental attitudes to television, family rules about television use, the general family 'ethos' or atmosphere), and the child responds to television as it is mediated by the intervening variables.

Sweden: How Viewing Times Shape TV Effects

Olga Linné studied thirty-four five- to six year-old children and their mothers in Stockholm. She showed the group a short segment of the popular Western TV series the 'High Chapparral'. Children were divided into heavy viewers and light viewers of the series. After the screening the children were tested for their reactions to a hypothetical conflict situation — a bicycle just given to them by a friend was suddenly taken by another child. A greater proportion of the heavy viewers than the light viewers responded aggressively, e.g. by fighting to get the bicycle back.

In exploring why heavy viewers tended to exhibit more aggressive behaviour Linné examined the family context of the children's viewing. She found that heavy viewers of the 'High Chapparral' watched much more TV in general, and that their mothers were also heavy viewers who liked Westerns. Moreover, these mothers imposed much fewer viewing restrictions. They believed that TV was fairly harmless and that their children should be free to see what they liked.

Most significantly, though both heavy and light viewers were frightened after viewing the programme, Linné found that there was a marked difference in what the children did directly after the programme. Because the heavy viewers watched the programme

in the evening just before going to bed they had less chance than the light viewers, who watched in the afternoon, to play and talk about the programme afterwards with their family and playmates. And of the heavy viewers, the ones who consistently chose an aggressive solution to the conflict situation were those who were already washed and dressed in pyjamas for bed when watching the programme.

Linné's conclusion is that family and parents can either facilitate or inhibit the effects of television in important ways. By providing an opportunity for children to play and talk about programmes immediately after they occur, parents can help dissipate the aggression which has been stimulated.

England: Mothers' Attitudes to TV Use

Unlike Linné's study, Brown's research is not a direct testing of the stimulus-intervening variable-response model. Rather Brown is interested in producing a set of measuring instruments which could be used to indicate how families intervene to mediate television effects. Brown, therefore, chose to measure family intervention in terms of the mother's attitude. In a survey of 450 mothers of nine-year-old children in Leeds, Brown uncovered six main attitudes towards television. These attitudes were: 1. PROTECTIVE: 'TV is frequently unsuitable for children.' 2. ANTI-ADDICTION: 'Children easily become addicted.' 3. LIBERAL: 'Let the child develop its own viewing pattern.' 4. POSITIVE: 'TV is welcome for its entertainment and information.' 5. INSTRUCTIVE: 'TV stimulates the child to consider more of life's realities.' 6. DELIBERATE: 'Parents use TV to socialize the child and evaluate the programmes with them'.

This schema of attitudes has aided Brown in filling out the picture of family interaction with TV. For example, mothers with a protective attitude discuss a programme only when it is over, while less protective mothers discuss it both during and after. Brown believes that these scales are sensitive to various aspects of the media, TV content, and to the family — all of which interact to form children's grasp and experience of TV.

Violent TV, Aggressive Children, and Family Lifestyles

Jerome L. Singer, Dorothy G. Singer, and Wanda S. Rapaczynski. 'Family Patterns and Television Viewing as Predictors of Children's Beliefs and Aggression.' *Journal of Communication*, Vol. 34, No. 2, 1984, pp.73-89.

One of the problems with most research on the effect of television on behaviour is that it does not look at the same group of viewers over a long enough time in order to test what the long-term effects, if any, of viewing might be. The study of the Singers and Rapaczynski is significant, therefore, because it is a longitudinal study of sixty-three American children from 1977, when they were on average four years old, to 1982, when they were nearly nine. The hypothesis of this study was that heavy TV viewing, especially of realistic action-adventure programmes, in early childhood, would, when combined with a variety of family factors, be a good predictor of later aggressive or restless behaviour, poorer school adjustment, poor self-restraint, and more evidence of belief in a 'scary' or threatening world.

Five major family variables were identified as potentially significant. These were: 1) parental use of power or physical punishment as a means of control; 2) mother's descriptions of themselves as less imaginative; 3) more disorderly household routines; 4) less sleep for children; and 5) a family environment in which children are not restricted in their viewing, and TV is seen positively as a source of entertainment and recreation.

The results of the study were found to reinforce previous research which had indicated a strong link between the viewing of violent programmes and later aggressive behaviour. Even when family and other variables, such as a disposition to act aggressively, were controlled for, heavy television viewing in the early years was a good predictor of aggressive behaviour and of a belief that the world was a rather 'mean and scary' place. The most important family variables

turned out to be parental emphasis on physical force and power, and a TV environment which was permissive. The authors conclude by warning that parents, educators, and broadcasters need to be much more aware of the long-term effects of early TV viewing. In particular they point out that, in the USA at least, pre-school children's early viewing is often of cartoons filled with aggressive acts and aggressive solutions to situations of conflict.

Adolescents and TV: Patterns of Family Interaction

Jack McLeod and Jane D. Brown. 'The Family Environment and Adolescent Television Use' in *Children and Television*, ed. Ray Brown. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1976, pp. 199-234.

As children enter adolescence it is expected that both their use of media and their relationship with their families will undergo change. Researchers have been particularly interested in investigating if there are systematic changes in media use during adolescence, what learning models, if any, might account for emerging patterns of use, and whether parents influence children's media use into middle and late adolescence. McLeod and Brown have examined these issues in the context of the media and youth change research programme at the University of Wisconsin Mass Communications Research Centre. They draw on data from studies on the political socialization of adolescents, and on TV violence and aggressive behaviour.

Socio- and Concept-Oriented Families

McLeod and Brown have established that there are systematic changes in adolescents' TV viewing patterns. They watch substantially less, with the greatest drop in situation comedies and variety comedy shows. These changes, and children's TV use in general, can be related to family interaction patterns, which can be measured along basic dimensions: socio-orientation and concept-orientation. In socio-oriented families parents expect children to defer to them, to keep harmonious personal relationships, and to restrain feelings. In concept-oriented families parents actively stimulate the child to develop independent views about the world and to be aware of as many sides of an issue as possible. McLeod and Brown identify four main family types.

LAISSEZ-FAIRE families are low in concept- and socio-orientation. They foster neither internal family communication nor interest in the world of ideas. Their children are strongly influenced by their peer groups, do not develop an interest in public affairs or entertainment programming, and identify more than other children with the characters in the action show.

The PROTECTIVE family has a low concept-orientation but a high socio-orientation and stresses family harmony at the expense of independent inquiry. Its children watch the most TV, perhaps to escape interacting with their parents, but the parents are also heavy viewers. Children from such families are the highest viewers of violent programmes and Saturday morning violent cartoons.

PLURALISTIC families are high in concept-orientation but low in socio-orientation. They encourage children to explore new ideas by exposure to controversial issues, even if such ideas clash with those of the parents. Children in these families watch a less than average amount of TV, and prefer TV news and the newspaper. They see the least amount of violent programming.

The CONSENSUAL family is high in both concept- and socio-orientation. It thus tries to balance both family harmony and independent thought. In practice this amounts to the children being free to think as they like, provided it coincides with their parents' views. The children watch a fair amount of violent programming. They are the most likely to see TV as close to real life.

In examining the long-term effects of family communication patterns, McLeod and Brown found that only if teenagers find compatible environments do they continue the TV use pattern learned at home. For example, only if pluralistic children go to college will they continue to be involved in public affairs as they were when younger.

McLeod and Brown point to the need for long-term study of parents and children, and of college peer groups as also displaying similar socio- and concept-orientations. They are also critical of the research in this area for not providing the necessary information on the long-term consequences of teenage media use on later adult behaviour.

Adolescents and TV: The Role of Parents and Peers

Elias Hedinsson, *TV, Family and Society: The Social Origins and Effects of Adolescents' TV Use*. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiskell, 1981.

Ulla Johnsson-Smaragdi, *TV Use and Social Interaction in Adolescence: A Longitudinal Study*. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiskell, 1983.

Both Hedinsson's and Johnsson-Smaragdi's studies are products of the major Media Panel research programme being conducted at the University of Lund and the University College of Växjö in southern Sweden. It is a long-term study of media use by nursery and 'basic school' children and their parents. Children in the 'basic school' panel are from eleven to fifteen years old. There is a main panel of 500 adolescents (born in 1965) and their parents, and three 'side panels' of 250 children (born in 1963, 1967, and 1969) and their parents. The research design allows for both 'cross-sectional' and longitudinal studies.

Social Class and Adolescent TV Use

Hedinsson's study attempts to determine the relationship between social class and adolescent TV use. His research model also takes into account the influence of peer and family socialization on TV use, as well as incorporating a combined 'uses and effects' approach which examines the possible consequences of TV use, as measured by adolescents' world views and social perceptions.

Hedinsson argues that the family communication patterns (socio- and concept-orientation) used by McLeod and Brown can be shown to be directly related to social class differences, with working-class families being much more socio-oriented. Hedinsson was also able to relate Brown's measures of parental attitudes to TV with social class: working-class parents are more favourable to adolescents' TV use in general, while middle-class parents are most concerned with TV's possible addictive nature. In addition, Hedinsson was able to

II: TV Images of the Family

Bradley S. Greenberg et al. *Life on Television: Content Analyses of U.S. TV Drama*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1980.

Stiftung PRIX Jeunesse International. *The Family on Television: Empirical Study by Content Analysis in Four Countries*. Munich: PRIX Jeunesse, 1984.

The reasons for studying the portrayal of families on TV derive from those theories of social learning which hypothesize that children do learn a variety of behaviours from TV. Apart from learning aggressive behaviour, research has suggested that children learn pro-social behaviour, sex-role expectations, and, Greenberg suggests, family roles, behaviours and attitudes.

Greenberg's content analysis of the way TV families interacted on US commercial TV is one part of a project which has analysed the presentation of pro- and anti-social behaviour, the portrayal of Black Americans, and the portrayal of the sexes as well.

Greenberg et al discovered that most TV portrayals of family interaction were oriented to affiliative, helping behaviour, rather than conflict or antagonism; conflict was concentrated in husband and wife pairings. There was nearly an equal number of types of family presented — nuclear, single parent, and childless. First marriages are the majority; divorce is increasing; the typical TV family has three members; virtually all are immediate, nuclear family relationships. And, perhaps surprisingly, the number of females in the TV family is equal to that of males. However, Greenberg notes that family relationships occur on fictional TV series in a "comparative minority fashion". Only one out of seven or eight characters has an identifiable relative on the programme.

Distorting the Social Reality of the Family

Under the auspices of the PRIX Jeunesse foundation, researchers in England, Denmark, Hungary, and Australia have undertaken a content analysis of TV programmes portraying the family over a

show that parents' own TV behaviour was also strongly class-related, and a clear working-class and middle-class *style* of viewing. The working-class were heavy viewers of fictional programmes (e.g. situation comedies and adventure series) while the middle-class were light viewers of informational programming.

In Hedinsson's view specific parental attitudes to TV are better at explaining TV use than family communication patterns in general. He also maintains that the influence of social class increases through adolescence as that of family socialization variables decreases. Finally, he found that there was a steady, if weak, tendency for adolescents to shape their social perceptions in accordance with the TV portrayal of the world.

The Positive Side of Family TV Viewing

The later study of Johnsson-Smaragdi further complicates the already complex picture of adolescent TV use painted by Hedinsson. Johnsson-Smaragdi had the advantage over Hedinsson of observing the same adolescents at the age of eleven, at thirteen, and at fifteen-years-old. She found that TV viewing peaked at the age of eleven or twelve, when children were thought a little too young to be allowed much freedom outside the home in the evening. She also found that there was little evidence of TV becoming a substitute for social interaction with peers. In peer groups of younger children TV viewing is used as a 'coin of exchange' and as a means to obtain status.

In later adolescence, Johnsson-Smaragdi found that TV use depended upon the extent to which the adolescent participated in family life, but that, in general, TV use gave way to pop music and movies. Overall Johnsson-Smaragdi is inclined to feel that TV viewing can actually enhance and strengthen family and peer activities at different stages of adolescence.

Johnsson-Smaragdi concludes by pointing to the strong finding that through their own viewing habits parents strongly influence their children's amount of viewing. This holds true in all social classes, and for both sexes. If parents, therefore, are concerned about the amount of TV their children watch, there is at least one thing they can do: watch less TV themselves!

period of a week. The research was coordinated by James Halloran at the Centre for Mass Communication Research, Leicester. The research was considered important on the grounds that TV images of the family can have an impact of the family's perception of itself, and can influence lawmakers engaged in framing family legislation. The content analysis is the first step in a larger project which, it is hoped, will study the family as an agent in creating its own images of itself, which are later adopted and reflected back by socializing agents such as the media and schools.

The research was especially interested in six areas of family life: marriage, relationships between the generations, sexuality, aging, family autonomy, work, and leisure. The portrayal of families in all four countries commonly misrepresents and distorts the social reality of the family. Although there is general esteem for family life, there is an imbalance at many levels. Portrayals generally under-represent poor families, the lower classes, ethnic minority groups, the old, and women. Middle and upper classes, the ethnic majority group, the young and middle-aged, and men are more common subjects of TV programmes. In short, the programmes reflect the hierarchical organization of societies and their power structures, and do not square with governmental and census studies of the family in each of the countries. Moreover, since many of the family programmes come from other lands, for example, a Brazilian show seen in Denmark, this distortion has international implications. The researchers fear that these TV distortions may in the long term lead governments to frame family policies for a family world which does not exist in reality.

III: New Approaches to Family and Media Research

In recent years communication researchers have begun to explore the utility of a variety of approaches in addition to the behaviourist model in understanding the ways in which families interact with television. The following section examines recent research which builds upon symbolic interactionism, refinements of social learning theory in the 'contextualist' approach, ethnomethodology, rules theory, and family systems theory.

Symbolic Interaction: The Meaning of TV

Godfrey J Ellis, Sandra Kay Streeter, and Joann Dale Engelbrecht. 'Television Characters as Significant Others and the Process of Vicarious Role Taking'. Dennis K Davis, Robert Abelman. 'Families and Television: An Application of Frame Analysis Theory,' *Journal of Family Issues (JFI)* Vol 4, No 2 1983, pp 367 - 404.

Ellis et al and Davis and Abelman put forward a number of propositions based upon symbolic interactionism which they hope may guide future empirical research. Ellis et al suggest that for some viewers TV characters may play the part of 'significant others', while Davis and Abelman draw on Goffman's frame theory to suggest that some children may rely upon TV to construct the 'frames' which order their perception of the world. In both instances the focus is not on what TV does to viewers but on how viewers use TV to help construct a meaningful social world.

Ellis et al argue that viewers may take the role of certain TV characters both when viewing and in non-viewing contexts. They may also modify their behaviour to conform to the imaginary evaluations of such TV characters. A mother for example, may so identify with a certain TV mother that her relationship with and attitudes to her children may be modelled on the TV personality. It is also suggested that TV viewers may take the roles of two TV characters at once, vicariously evaluating the behaviour of one from the imagined perspective of the other. By engaging in such role-taking viewers learn how to play their part in everyday social interaction.

The frame analysis hypothesis is an attempt to reorient socialization research. It implies that the role of the family in socialization can be, at least partially, displaced by TV. From the point of view of Davis and Abelman, the power of TV to frame the world of children is a challenge to parents to intervene actively in the child's use of TV. Adolescents, for example, who are dependent upon TV for their frames, may come to believe that the world of Southern California, 'so regularly and positively' depicted in US TV series, is the ideal world for developing their personal objectives. The creation of framing skills which help children to see the world in a realistic way is, in the end, highly dependent upon the kind of social environment created by parents.

The Context of TV Viewing

Gene H Brody and Zolinda Stoneman. 'The Influence of Television Viewing on Family Interaction: A Contextualist Framework.' *JFI*. Vol 4, No 2 1983, pp 329-366.

While symbolic interactionism draws attention to the manner in which families may construct meanings from TV content, the contextualist approach advocated by Brody and Stoneman stresses the need to situate the act of family viewing within specific contexts. Building upon social learning theory they see the total context of a family watching TV as including the physical setting, the presence or absence of specific family members, and the combination of these physical and personal factors. Each family member actively participates in adapting the family context to meet individual and family needs. The basic idea is that family members interact according to definite pattern, a kind of 'pecking order'.

The physical setting offers contextual factors. Interaction varies according to the amount of interest the programme created; the arrangement of the TV set(s) and seating; the number of co-viewers (mothers play with their children less while the father is also watching; the more watching, the less the conversation); and the suitability of the programme for the age group and social class. Working-class families may make fun of ballet but sit enraptured during a thief's daring escape.

Personal factors also affect family interaction during a show. Fathers tend to become more engrossed in the programmes, as do their children, while the mothers keep an eye on both father and child. The level of fatigue, health, alertness, activity, and excitement also influences the intensity of the family interaction. If TV is being used as a refuge from a squabble, or if the subject is interesting and relevant, the amount of conversation will decrease. In testing their theory Brody and Stoneman found that since children are less interested in the news than parents, the parents interacted more with the children during the news, despite the parents' own interest in the news. In this way the child's level of interest in the programme helps structure family interaction.

Ethnomethodology: The Social Uses of TV

James Lull, 'The Social Uses of Television,' *Human Communication Research* Vol 6, No 3 1980, pp. 197-209. Lull, 'Family Communication Patterns and the Social Uses of Television,' *Communication Research* Vol 7, No 3 1980, pp 319-334.

Ethnomethodology studies the 'how' — the ways, processes, observable and subtle — families use TV to put meaning into their world and interpret TV in terms of their world. An ethnomethodological approach focuses on all the everyday, taken-for-granted ways by which families unconsciously integrate TV into the total home life, from the arrangement of the furniture in front of the TV to scheduling meals about the evening news. To investigate these media-related behaviours and to support his typology of social uses of TV Lull has evolved a research method which combined ethnological research with the uses and gratifications literature.

What people do with the media, their social uses of TV, is often not obvious and is taken-for-granted in the total communicative context of TV viewing. The participant-observer method used by ethnologists permits a researcher to observe a family by participating with them in their TV viewing. This allows the researcher to gain an inside view of the situations which families create when they view. So Lull's team spent three to seven days with 200 US families from the social and job levels. According to family interviews, their presence did not substantially alter normal viewing patterns.

Structural and Relational TV Uses

Lull has distilled his findings into a descriptive typology. Lull's typology stresses the social uses of TV, that is, how families make their use of TV function in their overall communication and interaction. He identifies two general types of social uses: *structural* and *relational*. Structurally, a family may use TV for background noise, entertainment, or companionship during household chores. It can also regulate the daily routine, affect conversation patterns by enforcing silence during programmes, and restrict participation in community activities.

But it is the four relational uses of TV that have proven more useful for later research: 1. COMMUNICATION FACILITATION. Viewers use TV's themes, stories and characters to illustrate and thereby facilitate conversations. The very act of viewing together can make conversations easier by offering a reason to avoid awkward eye contact during a lull in the conversation. The more controversial programmes can help families clarify one another's values and attitudes as discussions are sparked off.

2. AFFILIATION/AVOIDANCE. Watching TV as a family can be the occasion for an increased sense of family solidarity as well as an escape ritual. When all the family tries to predict 'who did it' in a detective show, and when they discuss the implications of 'Dallas,' co-viewing can be a truly communal experience. As a

parallel focus of attention, TV can be used to avoid having to confront each other, and as an escape hatch to a world beyond the family.

3. **SOCIAL LEARNING.** What one can learn from TV has many social applications. TV offers information for daily living; advertisements and political messages set the agenda for decisions affecting the family and society. TV also offers a more subtle learning experience in the form of role models; situation comedies provide practical and much imitated suggestions for solving family problems. Moreover, parents who value special network programmes, public TV and quiz shows as substitute school experiences, encourage their children to watch them.

4. **COMPETENCE/DOMINANCE.** When a parent, for example, a mother, regulates her children's viewing according to her standards, she demonstrates her competence as a good mother to her child and spouse. Family series characters may confirm how the parent acts. For example, when the TV series father keeps his temper in an argument, the viewing father feels his own restraint confirmed. On the other hand TV is also used in interpersonal strategies for dominance. The right to watch TV is often given as a reward or withheld as a punishment.

Lull has also combined these four social uses of TV with the socio- and concept-orientations described above. He found that family communication patterns can guide predictions about how individuals in families will use TV for a broad spectrum of interpersonal goals. For example, families which stress harmonious social relations use TV to structure their activities and conversational patterns. By and large, concept-oriented family members reject almost all of the social uses of TV in their extreme disregard to TV as a way to establish, maintain, or enhance family communication. Instead they use TV to regulate their children's experiences, to facilitate arguments, and to convey family values — all limited more to ideas than social relationships.

Rules Theory: But Who Makes the Rules?

T R Lindlof and P J Traudt, "Mediated Communication in Families: New Theoretical Directions," in *Communication in Transition*, ed M S Mander. New York: Praeger, 1983, pp 260-278.

Lindlof and Traudt are concerned to trace the movement of research away from theories grounded in social learning theory towards those which derive from phenomenology, and especially, symbolic interactionism, ethnomethodology, and rules theory. Rules theory involves studying how families produce regular patterns of their daily life. It includes rules governing family TV use, such as when, where, and with whom, programmes may be watched. And it also studies the sources of such control. The usual direction of rules is from parents to children.

Because a family's rules about TV use are often latent and unnoticed, even when an interviewer asks about them, the challenge for researchers is to tease out deeply rooted rules. But there is a problem if researchers ask only one family member, for example, the mother, about the rules, when in fact the children may not have even been aware of these rules. It also happens that, although children are not supposed to watch sexually explicit programmes, in fact they often do, provided that their parents do not have to approve.

But there is a deeper theoretical problem. TV viewing is so habitual that to pinpoint specific rules may be fruitless. Moreover, truly implicit rules are more like norms, 'metarules', general guidelines about which rules will be in effect on a particular occasion. Norms are value baselines which allow families considerable flexibility, while rules are agreements to maintain the relationships in the family system. Thus it may be a family TV rule not to view on week nights. But if on Wednesday night there is a moon landing, the family norm of keeping up with historic events may allow the children to view them. The problem is how to discover and express these hidden norms.

Rules have proven useful concepts to help predict how the ideology of a given culture will influence an individual's use of TV. Moreover, a child's social class can be an indicator of the number and type of the televiewing rules to be followed. Middle-class parents are more concerned how their children interpret particular programmes more than about their seeing such programmes together.

Systems Theory: Studying Family Processes

Irene Goodman "Television's Role in Family Interaction," *JFI* Vol. 4, No. 2, 1983, pp.405-424.

The family systems approach is the most determined attempt to escape from the linear stimulus-response model that has dominated so much of TV and family research. The systems approach proposes an *interactional framework* which is concerned not only with TV's role in the family but also with the family's use of TV. Furthermore, the systems approach uses the *family as the unit of analysis* rather than the individual family member, and studies *family process* as it relates to various behavioural outcomes, rather than looking at outcomes alone.

In examining the role of TV in family functioning, the family systems theorist needs to examine three major components of the family system. These are: 1) family structure; 2) family development and family; and 3) family adaptation.

The family structure is the hidden set of functional demands that organizes the way family members interact. Within the family structure TV can be used by family members in various ways: as boundary marker between persons, as companion, mediator, controlling mechanism or scapegoat. The scapegoat function may be particularly important since fighting over TV is easier and less threatening to family equilibrium than fighting over more difficult problems.

Family development refers to the transformation of the family over time. As children are born or enter adolescence the family is restructured as a system, and family rules and relationships are revised and updated. In this process the rules about TV viewing too, have to be modified and adapted. Major problems may arise, if, for example, parents continue to apply rules for nine-year-olds to teenagers.

Family adaptation represents how the family adapts to changing circumstances to maintain continuity and enhance the psychosocial growth of each member. The family has to adapt to stresses and pressures from inside and outside the family. TV may be a factor in stressful family relationships if, for example, the values expressed on TV are embraced by one or more family members and conflict with family values. This a common problem with parents and teenagers. There is also the problem of reconciling family values with values expressed by peers and others outside the family. Some of these value conflicts may be explicitly related to the acceptance or rejection of the viewing of certain types of programmes. It may be difficult for adults, for example, to admit to liking popular shows or soap operas if these are generally held to be cultural 'rubbish'.

Implications for Future Research

Goodman suggests a number of implications for future family research. In the first place, findings on the effects of TV could be reinterpreted using the family systems approach. TV violence studies may need to take into account that families could use TV to suppress conflict between family members; this will in turn interact with the effects of TV on a child's behaviour. Secondly, family systems theory could be helpful to designers of media education courses. The systems approach draws attention to the very many ways families use TV. Finally, family therapists may be able to use information about TV use as a diagnostic tool. In the USA, in particular, the family's behaviour in relation to the TV may have replaced their behaviour round the dining table as the key to understanding family functioning.

IV: The Video Cassette Recorder and the Family

J C Baboulin, J P Gaudin and P Mallein. *Le Magnétoscope au Quotidien: Un Demi-Pouce de Liberté*. Paris: Ed Aubier Montaigne and INA, 1983.

As the video cassette recorder (VCR) has increasingly become a mass consumer item across the Western industrialised world and also in countries such as Saudi Arabia, so interest has grown about its likely impact on the TV viewing habits of VCR owners. The work of Baboulin et al is one of the first attempts in France and Western Europe generally, to examine the VCR phenomenon in some depth. Baboulin et al have organised their study around three major questions: 1) how can one explain the growth of the VCR market and rapidity of VCR penetration? 2) What are the real and/or imaginary functions which the VCR fulfills for its users? 3) What significance has the VCR boom in comparison with other developments in the media?

In order to study these questions Baboulin et al developed a research method which combined both quantitative and qualitative elements: statistical data on VCR market penetration and production; in-depth non-directive interviews with VCR users; and ethnographic and sociological studies of VCR users in their social and cultural contexts. Using this methodology Baboulin et al have developed the hypothesis that the success of the VCR is related to the fact that it is a 'secondary' machine (essentially used as a complement to broadcast TV or film) and a 'banal' gadget which is easily assimilated into the pattern of everyday life. This secondary and commonplace machine, however, does introduce a new element into TV viewing by giving the user more control over what is seen and when it is seen.

A Profile of VCR-users

Although it is too early for a thorough study of the purchasers of VCRs, Baboulin et al have found that they tend to be parents thirty to forty years old with one or two pre-adolescent children. They can afford the VCR because they have already acquired the other usual consumer items: a car, a new kitchen, a HiFi, and a TV. Nevertheless, these parents feel the general financial pressure. The high cost of leisure activities outside the home — skiing, travel, and sport — force them to rely on in-home recreation. With the children

still in school their time and money are limited yet they still want to keep up with cultural developments. Teenagers cannot afford to acquire VCRs and, even if they could, their recreational interests are mostly outside the home — the cafe, the discotheque, sport. Teenagers use VCRs but only secondarily.

The VCR: Bringer of Family Harmony

VCRs enter into the social interaction of the family. Wives often complain that their husbands watch TV more than they care for them or for their children. TV is the wife's rival, an all-powerful, nourishing mother. So some wives agree to the VCR in the forlorn hope that, although the husband may watch as much TV, at least there is the remote chance that the pattern can be modified in favour of the wife and children. The advertisements for Betamax and other VCRs promise increased family harmony once the family has a VCR to resolve conflicts in choosing which programmes to watch. But these advertisements do not show the new form of conflict caused when he wants to look at a pre-recorded film and she wants the news. As a reward for good behaviour the children may make a recording they wanted. Parents may use a recording of a favourite cartoon to pacify baby at feeding time, or a feature film for longer periods of baby-sitting. VCRs can also bring harmony by reducing occasions when parental authority has to referee programme choice.

Living Together Separately

But VCRs can diminish the social viewing of shows. Families used to watch, laugh, and discuss together. As TV displaced earlier forms of neighbourhood sociability such as the corner cafe and the local cinema, so the VCR may displace family sociability. But new forms of sociability appear as the wife records a football match for her husband, a father an animated film for the children — little signs of the desire to help and to be a part of what brings pleasure to the others. The VCR thus removes the stigma of apparent selfishness connected with personal programme preferences. As one school girl said, one can live life a little more on one's own — each on his own side, but together.

PERSPECTIVES

Uncovering the Meaning of TV in Family Life

Research on television viewing and family communication is at a crossroads. The same challenge confronts both those in the effects tradition and those seeking new research approaches: to integrate the best in each other's methods. Quantitative measures — from counting the numbers of men/women, blacks/whites, rich/poor in TV programme content to refined analysis of attitude changes — give basic and necessary information. But quantitative research needs to be enriched and complemented by a more humanistic, critical and cultural approach. The soap operas and other popular programmes which daily fill the TV screens are expressions of popular cultural values, ideas and ideals. If we are to understand better how this TV world enters into everyday family life, we need to know more about how families as a whole and individual family members understand the values and ideas expressed through TV and relate them to other values and ideas which they hold. In a word, we need to know more about the *meaning* which TV content has in the lives of families. Only thus can the many subtle webs of signification be traced between the world of TV and the world of the family.

Secondly, there is a need to understand better the *meaning* that patterns of TV use have for different families and family members. How and when the TV is watched needs to be complemented by

studies which explore *why* the TV is used as a 'scapegoat' or an escape hatch from interpersonal interaction.

By examining these issues of *meaning* and combining them with data derived from more effects-oriented research, researchers could begin to explore more deeply the interaction of family and TV over time. Such a more refined and sensitive research method would enable study of family viewing against the flow of the family life cycle of birth, raising children, and old age. This method could also more accurately register the changes which are introduced by such media as the video cassette recorder and the computer.

Finally, the research findings could act as a foundation for a much more effective education of the family in the use of the media. For example, research shows that socio-oriented families use action-adventure programmes to foster family harmony. So any effective attempt to inculcate a more critical TV use by such families requires more precise research on what resources such families have to begin viewing TV more critically. Research on family TV viewing is at a crossroads, and the response of researchers comes just when the family's role in society is being appreciated afresh now that the new media, too, are becoming members of the family.

PAUL KENNEY, JAMES McDONNELL

Issue Co-editors

Current Research on the Family and the Media

AUSTRALIA

David Bednall (4 Linlithgow St, Mitcham, Vic 3123) has written "The Role of the Media in Migrant Settlement", on how Greek immigrants construct their views of Australian family life from media images.

Dr D E Edgar (Director, Institute of Family Studies, 766 Elizabeth St, Melbourne Vic 3000) will study how the media foster or inhibit family communication.

Dr Patricia Edgar (Director, Australian Children's Television Foundation, 22-24 Blackwood St, N Melbourne Vic 3000) studies TV and the family and has co-authored with **R Cooke** *Families without Television* (La Trobe Univ, 1979).

Drs Naomi Rosh White and **Peter B White** (Ctr for the Study of Educational Communication and Media, School of Ed, La Trobe Univ, Bundoora Vic 3083) have recently completed a large study of ethnic families and television.

CANADA

Dr J Philippe Rushton (Dept of Psychology, University of W Ontario, London N6A 5C2) is interested in how parents and children acquire norms for behaviour from TV. Has written *Altruism, Socialization and Society* (Prentice Hall 1980).

DENMARK

Olga Linné (Research Director, Mass Communication Research, Danish Broadcasting Corp, Danmarks Radio, 2860 Søborg) with **Niels-Aage** published *The Family and its Problems: Portrayal of the family during a week of Danish television*.

FRANCE

Maurice Dousset (Assemblée Nationale, 126 rue de l'Université, F-75355 Paris) has presented his report *La famille et les médias* to parliament to urge countering the imbalanced media image of the family.

Jacques Perriault (Director de Recherches, Institut National de la Recherche Pedagogique, F-75230 Paris) is studying how adolescents use computers in their homes.

GERMANY

Aktion Jugendschutz (Landesarbeitsstelle Baden-Württemberg, Staffenbergstrasse 44, 7000 Stuttgart 1) investigates and publishes on questions concerning dangers of the media for young people.

Prof Dr M Charlton (Psychologisches Inst der Universität, Abt. Klinische u. Entwicklungspsychologie, Belfortstr. 18, 78 Freiburg i Br.) with **K. Neumann** has several observational studies of how TV influences children's relation to their families and peers.

Prof Dr Kurt Lüscher (Sozialwissenschaftliche Fakultät, Universität Konstanz, Postfach 5560, 7750 Konstanz 1) has a conceptual and empirical analysis of the impact of mass media on families considered as 'ecologies of human development.'

Dr Jan-Uwe Rogge (Universität Tübingen, Ludwig-Uhland Inst für empirische Kulturwissenschaft, Schloss, 7400 Tübingen 1) and **Dr Herman Bausinger** will conduct a major research project of two years on how the new media might alter family rituals in the use of mass media.

Prof Dr Klaus Schleicher (Dir., Inst of Comparative Education, Univ of Hamburg, Sedanstrasse 19 II, 2000 Hamburg 13) is concerned with the inter-related effects of socialization in the home, school, and media.

GREAT BRITAIN

M E Allison et al (Modern Languages Ctr, Univ of Bradford, Bradford) are investigating the news story, including how the media represented the family during the Falklands war. Provisional title: *Media-Speak*.

Prof James D Halloran (Dir, Ctr for Mass Communication Research, Univ of Leicester, 104 Regent Rd, Leicester LE1 7LT) has directed a four-country project on how the TV image of the family contrasts with official statistics for the family. Cf. page 3.

Dr Barrie Gunter (Research Officer, Independent Broadcasting Authority, 70 Brompton Rd, London SW3 1EY) is directing research on how the personality characteristics of parents relate to their and their children's programme preferences.

Bryan L G Luckham (Extra Mural Dept., Univ of Manchester, Manchester M13 9PL) conducted a Self-Programming Discussion Group Project on the theme of Television and the Family from 1981-2.

Dr Cathy Murphy (Dept of Psychology, Univ of Nottingham, University Pk, Nottingham NG7 2RD) plans to write a book aimed at parents of young children to help them develop their cognitive, linguistic and social skills.

ITALY

Dr Sabino S Acquaviva (Istituto di Scienze Politiche e Sociali, Università di Padova, via del santo 28, 35100 Padua) is working on open-ended long-term research on infants from the statistical, medical, psychological and sociological aspects, and in particular the parent-child relationship.

Dr Giancarlo Mencucci (Verifica programmi Trasmissi, RAI, viale Mazzini 14, 00195 Rome) under the direction of **Prof Milli Bonanno** has collaborated on research on the characteristics of the family presented in fictional television.

Pierpaolo Donati (Sezione di Politiche Sociali, Sanitarie e Della Famiglia, Dipto. di Sociologia, Università degli Studi di Bologna, Via Belle Arti, 42, 40126 Bologna) plans to publish his surveys on Family, Mass Media and Health Behaviour.

LEBANON

Jennifer W Bryce (Health Behavior and Education, Van Dyke 308, American Univ of Beirut) is analyzing taped family conversations during TV viewing for the amount and types of verbal mediation. She plans publishing a comparative study of families and TV in the US and Pakistan with **Dr Durre Ahmed** (National College of Arts, Lahore).

SOUTH AFRICA

Dr D P Van Vuuren (Head, Div for Media Effect Research, Inst for Communication Research, HRSC, Private Bag X41, Pretoria 0001) is directing a comprehensive study on the impact of TV on children and family communication.

SWEDEN

Dr Cecilia v Feilitzén and **Gunnar Andren** (Ctr for Mass Comm Research, Univ of Stockholm, S-106 91 Stockholm) are studying whether cultural patterns, past and present, tend to reinforce or counteract the marginalization of children. Their analysis of social relations of children includes a study of the family on TV.

UNITED STATES

Prof Robert Abelman (Dept of Communication, Cleveland State Univ, Cleveland, OH 44115) will publish "Styles of Parental Disciplinary Practices as a Mediator of Children's Learning from Prosocial Television Portrayals."

Profs. Robert S Alley and **Irby B Brown** (Depts of Religion and of English, respectively, Univ of Richmond, Virginia) wrote and produced a one-hour PBS documentary on the commercial TV portrayal of the family.

Communication Technology Laboratory (Michigan State Univ, East Lansing MI 48824-1212), with the team of **Dr T F Baldwin**, **Dr B S Greenberg**, **C Heeter**, **D Atkin**, **T Birk**, **R Pauch** and **R Srigley**, are preparing a series of studies on the impact of cable TV on young people, parental mediation of this impact, and viewing styles as reflecting family patterns.

Paul and Sarah Edwards (Assoc for Electronic Cottagers, 677 Canyon Crest Dr, Sierra Madra CA 91024) direct CompuServe's Work-at-Home Special Interest Group by answering home computer users' questions, and are publishing *Working at Home: The Complete Guide*. Jeremy P Tarcher/Houghton Mifflin.

Dr Irene F Goodman (Lab for Human Dev, Grad School of Ed, Harvard Univ, Appian Way, Cambridge MA 02138) presented "The Future of TV in the Family" at the Groves Conference in N Carolina.

Prof Edmund P Kaminski (School of Speech, Kent State Univ, Kent OH 44242) is researching how families mediate the influence of TV aggression on real life.

Dr Guy Lometti (Manager, Social Research, American Broadcasting Companies, 1330 Ave of the Americas, NY 10019) supervises research on family reaction to special TV movies like "The Winds of War" and "The Day After".

Prof James Lull (Dept of Theatre Arts, San Jose State U, CA 95191-0098) is writing "Images and Interaction" a theoretical approach to all studies of the media in natural settings, especially the home.

Roy L Moore (Dept of Communication, Georgia State Univ, Univ Plaza, Atlanta GA 30303) is researching the influence of family communication patterns on how TV ads affect adolescents.

Prof Ida Rousseau Mukenge (Dept of Sociology, Morehouse College, Atlanta GA 30314) heads the Family Research and Information Exchange Project on the impact of external institutions — schools, churches, the media, etc — on the family.

Prof Kimberly A Neuendorf (Dept of Communication, Cleveland State Univ, OH 44115) plans a content analysis of family interactions during religious TV.

Prof Edward L Palmer (Dept of Psychology, Davidson College, NC 28036) has three forthcoming articles on family communication as influenced by the network broadcast on life after nuclear war, "The Day After".

Prof Barbara Seels (Dir, Program in Ed Communications and Technology, Univ of Pittsburgh, PA15260) is assessing what is known and needs to be known about TV viewing settings for emotionally disturbed and for gifted learners.

Profs Dorothy G and Jerome L Singer (Co-directors, Family TV Research and Consultation Ctr, Yale Univ, CT06511) among other projects are focusing on the long-term effects of TV on the imagination and aggression of preschoolers.

Prof Paul J Traudt (Dept of Speech Communication, Univ of New Mexico, NM87131) is studying how the family interprets the collective social reality media offer.

Prof Michelle A Wolf (Dept of Broadcast Communication Arts, San Francisco State Univ, CA 94132) is writing a chapter on the impact of new technology on the American family structure.

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COMMUNICATION RESEARCH TRENDS — Published four times a year by the Centre for the Study of Communication and Culture ISSN 0144-4646

Editor: Robert A. White Asst. Editors: James McDonnell, Paul C. Kenney

Subscription:

Individual:	1 year, US\$7.50 (UK£4)	3 years, US\$20 (UK£10)
Institutional:	1 year, US\$12 (UK£7)	3 years, US\$30 (UK£17)
Student:	1 year, US\$6 (UK£3)	3 years, US\$15 (UK£6)

Possible ways of payment include: In US dollars by cheques drawn on a US bank. Or the equivalent in French francs, Canadian dollars, or West German Deutschmarks at Kontokorrent 4101421, Evangelische Kreditgenossenschaft EG, Postfach 180266, 6000 Frankfurt/Main. Payment in UK £ for residents of the UK and the Republic of Ireland only. UNESCO coupons and International Postal Money Orders are also accepted. Subscriptions run for calendar year. New subscribers receive back issues for that year.

Address all correspondence to:

COMMUNICATION RESEARCH TRENDS, 221 Goldhurst Terrace,
London NW6 3EP England Tel: (01) 328-2868

Typesetting and origination by Type Out, London SW16; (01) 677 1788

Printing by Roebuck Press, Mitcham, Surrey; (01) 640-9211

THE CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF COMMUNICATION AND CULTURE is an international service for communication research.

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