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Television And Children

By

Karina Constantino-David
This section looks into the possible effects of TV on the child's perception of himself and others in the world. Children's answers to questions regarding their favorite TV character, occupational aspirations, and stereotypes of people of different nationalities will be explored to determine the extent of TV's influence on the minds of children.

Television seems to occupy the lives of children more than any other medium. While the sample is not representative of the Philippines as a whole, perhaps to a certain extent the results of this study point to trends in children's viewing habits in the metropolitan Manila area, especially because of the overwhelming impact that social class plays in the determination of children's tastes, habits and thinking.

What then are the effects of television on children? What similarities can be seen? What differences appear and what seem to be the causes of these? These are the general questions that this study had tried to answer.

Based on the data and analysis presented in the body of this report, the following seem to be the most salient findings:

1. Television pervades the day to day lives of children. Despite differences in age, sex and social class, the amount of time
devoted to television-viewing seems to be fairly standard. The attraction television holds for children - in terms of content as well as its availability - does not differ among children in the sample.

2. Television does not affect all aspects of children's lives
   a) Leisure time activities, apart from the time spent watching TV, do not seem to be greatly affected by TV.
   b) Game situations are only slightly affected by TV.
   c) Aspirations of children are generally not patterned after occupation roles on television.
   d) For occupational as well as cultural stereotypes children's perceptions are strongly affected only when these people are not part of their direct experience.

3. Age and sex do not greatly affect most aspects of TV-viewing except as in the following:
   a) There are differences in the program preferences of children when understanding the complexity of a show is dependent on age.
   b) The sex roles which are culturally prescribed appear to influence program choices in that females are more attracted to shows which resolve around family life and males prefer action programs.
   c) Mother's opinions and instruction regarding TV differ in the sense that younger children are dealt with more strictly.
   d) Identifications and aspirations generally tend to follow sex appropriate occupations and heroes.
4. It is social class that appears as the strongest differentiating factor. Television, in a very general sense, is a social class leveller since it is almost equally accessible and it appeals, as a medium, to different socio-economic strata. However, class is at the same time a differentiating factor since it dictates and produces different effects on each stratum as follows:

a) Ownership and the availability of TV is one of the most immediate effects of social class. The direct relation, however, between class and ownership of TV is largely offset by the consequent culture of collective public viewing of the few TV sets in a lower class neighborhood. At the same time, middle-class neighborhoods and families tend to develop more private, family-centered viewing habits.

1) Because of the social class and the consequent non-ownership of a TV set, more lower class mothers watch regularly.

2) TV viewing in other homes results in the physical isolation of family members and the consequent lack of knowledge about many things in the TV viewing situation on the part of lower class mothers.

3) A slight difference results in the time of day devoted to TV viewing (more U.P. children watch in the afternoon) because of ownership or non-ownership of a television set.
4) The constraints imposed by watching elsewhere make children less able to engage in other activities while TV viewing.

5) Watching TV elsewhere isolates the child from usual conflicts that may arise as a result of parents' or siblings' differences in program choice.

6) Watching TV elsewhere considerably lessens the parent's influence on TV viewing.

b) The difference between the middle class and lower class socialization, style of life and philosophy creates many of the differences in TV watching. The middle class is more concerned with a western style of life (from how to raise children to what children should aspire for) while the lower class seems to take life as it comes.

1) Program preferences of both children and mothers differ in terms of the attractiveness of foreign shows for U.P. respondents and local shows for Bagumbayan interviewees.

2) Mothers' recommendations and general opinions regarding TV are consistent with the above statement.

3) Parents' influence in the TV viewing context is greater in the middle class subculture since TV is viewed as more than just entertainment.

4) Stereotyped images are more definitely TV bound among members of the lower class since TV becomes one of their few links with the larger society.

5) Middle class mothers are definitely more against the portrayal of sex and violence on TV.
The present study has tried to point out some significant aspects of TV-viewing in the Philippine sample. The data suggest that the impact of TV on children, especially that portion which moulds children's mind unconsciously, is indeed wide-ranging. If this study has opened a few doors in the understanding of the variables associated not only with TV viewing specifically but with how children think in general, then the excitement, the learning as well as the problems the study has brought have been worthwhile.