

families. In the U.S. population during the 1960s and 1970s, and continuing through today, most of the single-parent households are female headed. However, on television during the 1960s and 1970s, most of the single-parent households were male headed. Moreover, this overrepresentation of male-headed households continues through the 1980s and 1990s. The reasons for this odd circumstance are difficult to detect, but they seem to derive from an expedient formula in entertainment television. Nevertheless, it would be helpful to encourage broader representation of the diverse structures of families on television, because we know that young viewers are affected by the families they see on the small screen (Dorr, Kovaric, & Doubleday, 1990).

Clearly, it is important to think about the ways in which various social roles and groups are portrayed on television, because they can have an important influence in shaping children's views of the world. Consider, for example, the role of police officers on television and children's conceptions of police officers. On the small screen, most police officers are seen in highly active, violent situations: shootings, beatings, high-speed chases. If you ask children about their understanding of what police officers do, you will find that most young children readily report that police officers chase people and arrest them and shoot guns and drive fast cars. On the other hand, if you ask police officers on urban or rural police forces, you will find that most of their daily activities consist of filling out forms and writing reports. Indeed, many career veterans of police departments around the country report that they have rarely or never fired their guns at lawbreakers.

### Education

One of the strongly held beliefs about television is the notion that it is simply designed for entertainment. And yet, when viewers are asked about how they use television—how often they view, what they view, and why they view—they frequently demonstrate that they use television for many purposes beyond mere entertainment. For example, studies of audience members in the context of "uses and gratifications" theory (Murray & Kippax, 1979) have shown that some viewers use television in a very thoughtful and directive manner. Individuals who report that they watch television to keep abreast of current events do, in fact, watch more news, documentaries, and

current affairs programs. Conversely, those who watch large amounts of television often report that they use television to "escape the boredom of everyday life" or to relax and to be entertained and, indeed, watch a wide variety of television programs with no particular preferences evident in their viewing patterns.

With regard to the direct contributions of television to education and intellectual development in children, the pattern is somewhat mixed. We know that television is a window on the world; that programming can take viewers to places they might never see and offer experiences they might never feel or encounter in their daily life. With regard to children, we know that television is indeed a "special medium for a special audience" because it transcends the boundaries of time and space (Dorr, 1986). In addition, particular programs have been shown to have very special beneficial effects. One need only think of *Sesame Street* and *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* to tap into a large body of research on the effectiveness of planned, carefully designed programming (Comstock & Paik, 1991; Dorr, 1986; Huston et al., 1992; Murray, 1980). On a more anecdotal level, it has been reported that programs such as *Reading Rainbow* have stimulated intense interest in the books featured on the programs, and an episode of *Happy Days* in which the Fonz acquired a library card prompted a rush on libraries (Charren & Sandler, 1983; Comstock, 1989; Huston et al., 1992).

On the other hand, television has been identified as a hindrance to education in the sense that television viewing is an activity that may "steal" time from other activities more directly related to success in school. For example, studies of the introduction of television in a small Canadian community have shown that television availability is associated with a decrease in reading ability or reading skills components (T. M. Williams, 1986). However, the evidence from other studies is somewhat mixed (Anderson & Collins, 1988; Bryant & Anderson, 1983). We do know that the outlook is not as bleak as Winn (1987) might believe, but it seems clear that we have not been particularly successful in using television to its full potential in the education of our youngest citizens (Boyer, 1991; Kunkel & Murray, 1991; Palmer, 1988). Moreover, we also know that television can be both entertaining and educational—a fact observed in studies of public broadcasting programs ranging from *Mister Rogers* to *Reading Rainbow* to *Sesame Street/Electric Company/Ghost Writer* but also observed in commercial television offerings such as a set of

series developed by CBS in the mid-1970s: *USA of Archie*, *ISIS*, and *Fat Albert and the Cosby Kids*; along with the 30-year performance of a commercial/public swing program, *Captain Kangaroo*.

And yet, these educational programs represent only a small portion of the programs broadcast on our public and commercial television stations. True, cable television adds several channels and a different program mix, but this is still a relatively small and isolated attempt to use television for broad educational purposes. The history of television program development, as Turow (1981) noted, is one of economic enhancement at the expense of education. The more recent entry of a commercial news service for high school students developed by Whittle Communications is an example of one of the more problematic entrepreneurial activities (Murray, 1991; Pool, 1992). And yet, we know that the provision of news and current events through television programming designed for young viewers can lead to increase in awareness of important issues (Burkart, Rockman, & Ittelson, 1992). The policy question turns on whether noncommercial programming such as *CNN Newsroom* is a better alternative to the commercial programming of Channel One. And there are other policy-related concerns about the control—local versus national—of the content of current affairs information in the classroom.

Clearly, television can play a major role in the education of young viewers. Part of that role has been defined by a range of Public Broadcasting System television programs and some cable television channels. However, the commercial television networks have an important role to play in this process, and the Children's Television Act of 1990 has helped to define the nature of this role through the provision of broadly defined educational programming as a component of license renewal. As a nation, we can do more to enhance the educational uses of television.

### Hopes

The expectations and debates about television's potential for benefit or harm have been great and heated but we have not achieved the goal of integration of television and other components of a multimedia society in the service of the developing child. Nevertheless, hope springs eternal and there are many changes on the horizon. For example, the 1992 decision by the FCC to allow telephone compa-

nies to compete with cable television systems in the delivery of television programming to the home—the "video dial tone" concept—portends a revolution in the range of services and greatly expanded opportunities for integration of voice, data, and video.

Other significant changes affecting the future of children's television include the Children's Television Act of 1990, which was born of frustration over the systematic failure of the FCC to regulate in the public interest (Kunkel & Murray, 1991; Kunkel & Watkins, 1987; Levin, 1980; Minow, 1991). The 1990 act reintroduced limits on the amount of advertising contained in each hour of children's television, encouraged commercial television stations to broadcast some educational programming (broadly defined) for children, and established the framework for a national endowment for the development of children's television programs. This is an important development in the struggle to convince both the television industry and the viewing public to take television seriously, but it is only the beginning.

What is most needed to ensure adequate support for the developing child in a multimedia society is a collaborative effort among researchers, educators, broadcasters, and public policy specialists (Boyer, 1991; Flagg, 1990; Huston et al., 1992; Palmer, 1988) to develop a national telecommunications plan that will ensure a broad range of television programs targeted to the needs of children at various ages and stages of development. These programs would differ in their scope and theme, but they would share the characteristics of thoughtful, purposeful programming. We need to develop more programming for children that is both entertaining and educational. In short, we need to take television seriously without being too serious.

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FCC: I have read the recent article in U.S.News about this problem and feel that the prime time for children's viewing (7:00 to 9:00 PM) should be reasonably free from excessive sex and violence. I would hope that the networks would be responsible and do this voluntarily. If not then a first step would be to require ratings such as done in the movie industry. After that then perhaps the FCC could somehow stigmatize networks and the commercial sponsors who support programs which violate this standard. Maybe a better approach would be to reward networks and businesses who support responsible programming during this period. A last measure would be to develop regulation which could be construed as affecting freedom of expression but the extremely serious problem of crime and violence may justify this measure. Jim Nielsen, HC 83 Box 1120, Coquille, OR 97423

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