

Children's Media Use

HOW MUCH TV DO CHILDREN WATCH??

Calvert points out the problem of definition:

- TV is on
- Child is in room with TV on
- Child is in room looking at TV

...not to mention the difficulties in accurately measuring any of these (People meter and diary supposedly measure 'child is in room with TV on')

We have data from many different sources:

Kaiser Family Foundation study (2003):

- 2/3 of 0-6 yr olds live in homes where TV is on half the time or more; 1/3 where TV is on “always” or “most of the time”
- 0-6 yr olds spend 2 hours a day using ‘screen media’, same as time playing outside (they spend 39 minutes reading or being read to)
- 1/3 of 0-3 yr olds have TV in bedroom, 43% of 4-6 yr olds

Liebert & Sprafkin (1988):

- average TV on over 7 hours /day
- typical 6 month old 1.5 hours /day
- by 3 purposeful viewers with favorite shows
- peaks at 2.5 hours before elementary school
- then increases from age 8 to early adolescence to peak of 4 hours
- 2-3 hours during teens

These numbers are averages but there is a lot of variation: one early 1970s study had 25% of 6th and 10th graders watching 8.5 hours on Sunday and 5.5 hours on weekdays

MacBeth (1996):

Topeka study:

- 3-5 yr. olds: 19-20 hours/week
- age 7: drops to 15.5 hours

Mass. study: 5 yr. olds watched 15 hours/week

Early Window study:

- as primary activity 2 and 4 yr. olds watched 14 hours/week
- plus as secondary activity 2 yr. olds watched 12 more, 4 yr. olds 8 more hours

These are lower than Nielsen reports but likely more accurate

WHAT DO THEY WATCH ON TV??

- Informational programs for children viewed more by the younger children
- In Topeka study, *Sesame Street* dominated viewing of target audience, ages 3 to 5; then for older children there was nothing to replace it (has that changed?)
- Much viewing is not designed for children, ironically especially for younger children who don't go out of home yet (has that changed?)
- Lots of individual differences - if they watch a little now, will likely watch only a little later, same with program type.
- African Americans watch more TV and more TV programs with African Americans in them; little is known about other groups.
- Emotionally disturbed, mentally retarded, and learning disabled children watch more TV and more violent TV and cartoons; may be more likely to imitate violent problem solving they watch (Van Evra, 1990).
- Middle and upper class and "bright" children watch less.

WHY AND HOW DO THEY WATCH??

Two types of viewers/viewing:

- **TYPE A:** use for information, high level of mental effort, beta waves prominent, concept-orientation, instrumental (goal directed) viewing
- **TYPE B:** use for diversion, low level of mental effort, alpha waves prominent, socio-orientation (emotional), ritualistic viewing

Effects of TV depend on individual and age-related differences like how many experiences one has to compare TV with (children have fewer), how realistic TV is perceived to be, gender, etc. (Van Evra, 1990)

WHAT ABOUT OTHER MEDIA??

Computers:

Kaiser Family Foundation study (2003):

- Half of 0-6 yr olds have used a computer; 70% of 4-6 yr olds
- In a typical day a quarter of 4-6 yr olds use a computer; they use it just over an hour on average

Video games:

Kaiser Family Foundation study (2003):

- A third of children 0-6 have played a video game; half of 4-6 yr olds
- 56% of boys and 36% of girls 4-6 have played video games

Books and other written media:

Kaiser Family Foundation study (2003):

- 80% of 0-6 yr olds read or are read to on a typical day, on average for 49 minutes (vs. 2:22 for screen media)
- 0-6 yr olds in heavy TV viewing households less likely to read every day and spend less time when they do

What about... films (theater), videos, radio, CSs/tapes/records, newspapers and magazines, comic books??

More information: <http://www.frankwbaker.com/mediause.htm>

Roberts, D. F., Foehr, U. G., Rideout, V. J., & Brodie, M. (2003). *Kids and Media in America*. Cambridge University Press.

