FANTASY-REALITY DISTINCTIONS OF FOUR- AND FIVE-YEAR-OLD MIDDLE-INCOME WHITE CHILDREN IN RELATION TO THEIR TELEVISION VIEWING PREFERENCES AND HABITS

THESIS

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Methods of study include two questionnaires and eight photographs of television characters used while interviewing sixty children, ages four and five. The data showed that the children actively selected the television programs they watched rather than watching at random. They watched television regularly and named the programs they watched. The children perceived a great amount of parental supervision in their viewing of television. Most children were able to understand the concepts of fantasy and reality, to distinguish between those concepts, and to apply them to specific television program characters and their actions. However, the five-year-olds showed a greater tendency to identify television program characters as make-believe.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Television is a member of a young child's family. Recent research shows that 97 percent of all the homes in the United States have one or more television sets (16). With the advent of television, 60 percent of American families have changed their sleeping habits, 55 percent have altered their meal times, and 78 percent use TV as a babysitter (5, p.11).

A child in our society will spend the equivalent of 3,000 entire days or nearly nine years of his life watching television. By the time a child is five years old, he will have as many contact hours with television as are required for a Bachelor of Arts degree (1, p.7; 6, p.1; 10, p.7).

With this much input from television, one would assume that children are influenced by what they see. Television is a tremendous force that helps shape these children's attitudes and provides them with random experiences from which they will draw for the rest of their lives. As Robert Liebert, researcher and Associate Professor of Psychology at State University of New York at Stony Brook, states, "Quite simply, any steady diet of television will have a powerful influence on children. Its effect is, at least in part, the inevitable, natural consequence of observing behavior in others . . ." (7, p. 16).

Richard Granger, Associate Professor of Clinical Pediatrics at the Yale University Child Center, says, ". . . for a large number of children, television is society at large. Through its powerfully combined audio and visual impact delivered directly into the child's home, it is the face of the adult world, the reflection of society" (19, p. 8).

T. Berry Brazelton, pediatrician, feels that "Even though we have to face the fact that television is not the best medium for a child to be exposed to, it does have an undeniable importance in the world today. From all the evidence it looks as if it is going to be around for a very long time, and we simply have to come to terms with it" (4, p. xv).

Background of the Problem

The preponderance of current research on television and children seems to deal with two major categories: violence on television and television in relationship to minority and lower-income children. Since the Surgeon General's Advisory Committee on Television and Social Behavior research in 1971 (18), a large body of research literature has been produced attempting to show the effects of television violence upon children (5, 9). Concurrently, many researchers, including those affiliated with Action for Children's Television and Children's Television Workshop, have spent thousands of dollars investigating the treatment of black and other minority groups on network children's television as well as measuring what these children are perceiving from the television set (6, 7).

The largest group of American children, those in white middle-income families, have been ignored by most researchers. In 1970, the Bureau of the Census reported that of the 182,869,334 family members in the United States, 46.8 percent (85,592,493) were in the white, middle and upper income categories. When only families of three or more members are considered, on the assumption that most two-member families consist of two adults, the white, middle and upper income group is 49.8 percent of the total (17).

Research in the area of middle-income children is lacking. The research which is available compares middle-income white children with lower-income children or with minority children (5, 9, 10).

Research on the relationship between young children and television is limited as well. In reference to the Surgeon General's report, Alberta Siegel, a member of the advisory committee, writes,

> Only a few of the investigations can be said to have broken totally new ground. Others developed or

> extended approaches which were already on the scene, using larger samples, better stimulus materials, more sophisticated statistical analyses, etc. Committee members were disappointed that so few of the investigations concerned very young children . . . (12, p. 20).

There is also a need to add research data on how early childhood development ties in with what young children prefer to watch on television. Little information has been collected on the role of television in the early stages of a child's development (3, p. 32).

> . . . most research studying the effects of television on children has not captured children's earliest experiences with television; instead, studies have concentrated on television's influence on school-age children and on adolescents. This is unfortunate; the years before the fifth birthday, when the child is especially open to new learning and new experiences, should be a period when television viewing might be especially influential (15, p. 56).

In Volume II of the Surgeon General's Television and Social Behavior reports and papers, under "Future Research," the question is asked,

> What do children think about television? We know that young children sometimes have a difficult time separating reality from fantasy. How does this difficulty extend to their viewing of television? Do young children mistake what is real for fantasy, and what is fantasy for reality? . . . Besides knowing that young children enjoy television, we have little idea of their attitudes and beliefs about this medium of communication (14, p. 368).

Current literature emphasizes the importance of fantasy and reality in the lives of young children. Norman

Paul, Assistant Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at Tufts Medical School, points out:

> Another invisible factor that influences a child's reaction to television is his ability to determine the differences between reality and fantasy. Yet at the same time, the tremendous impact of television is precisely in the area of providing children a way of satisfying their hunger for fantasy . . . (11, p.81).

Boston psychiatrist John B. Spillane believes that,

> Merely living with the TV set in the house helps the child develop distinctions between fantasy and reality. He comes to understand that the on-and-off switch provides him with some control over the picture on the tube. And this control factor gradually weans the child away from his acceptance of the television picture as reality (8, p.18).

In 1936, Anna Freud spoke of the value of fantasy outlets:

> The real point at issue is how far it must be the task of education to induce children of even the tenderest years, to devote all their efforts to assimilating reality, and how far it is permissible to encourage them to turn away from reality and construct a world of phantasy (2, p.272).

A child has his own view of reality. The forty years of Jean Piaget's research and child study stress this fact. Four- and five-year-old children are in the transitional period of Piaget's pre-operational stage. His data concludes that a radical change occurs in the child's modes of reasoning at about age three and again at about age five or six (13, p.90).

By using the stages of thinking from Piaget and the findings of other child development authorities as a baseline, original research dealing with television and the young middle-income white child could help fill the gap in the current literature.

Statement of the Problem

The problem of this study was the television viewing preferences, television viewing habits, and the ability to distinguish fantasy from reality in selected television programs of four- and five-year-old middle-income white girls and boys.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the term "viewing preferences" is defined as the television program choices of four- and five-year-old children as reported by them in response to the question, "Which programs do you watch?"

The term "viewing habits" is used in this study to refer to the child's activities while viewing and the environment in which the child views television. Some factors which are included are hours of viewing, whether viewing is supervised, and whether the child engages in other activities while viewing television.

The terms "fantasy" and "reality" used in this study apply to the characters, physical surroundings and actions portrayed in television programs. "Fantasy," therefore, refers to characters, physical surroundings, and actions in a television program which would be impossible in life. "Reality" thus refers to characters, physical surroundings, and actions in a television program which are possible.

Procedures

Interviews were conducted with sixty girls and boys, four and five years of age, randomly selected from three private preschools and day care centers.

A questionnaire was devised which provided information regarding television program preferences and television viewing habits of the sixty selected four- and five-year-old children.

A second questionnaire was devised for a second interview with the children. The purpose of this questionnaire was to determine if the children were able to distinguish fantasy from reality in relation to the television programs they said they preferred. These children were interviewed both times by the researcher on a one-to-one basis.

The various elements of this study are presented in the following sequence:

Chapter I is a general introduction of the research problem, describing the questions to be explored.

In Chapter II, the relevant previous research in the area is reviewed.

The procedures employed in the study are described in Chapter III.

In Chapter IV the findings are presented.

In Chapter V, conclusions are summarized and areas of recommended additional research are identified.

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CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

Today's four- and five-year-old children have never lived in a world without television. The complexity and importance of this fact is being assessed by many early childhood educators. Psychologists and psychiatrists along with educators are sharing earnestly in the concern of television's impact on young children (6, 14).

> Virtually every family in the United States, regardless of its economic status, has at least one television set; more Americans have TV than have indoor plumbing. The average set is turned on approximately six hours and eighteen minutes per day. By the time average American children become sixteen, they have spent approximately 15,000 hours in front of a TV set -- or about 4,000 more hours than they have spent in a classroom. Only sleeping engages more hours (11, p.5).

Nancy Larrick, author, teacher, and founder of the International Reading Association, says, "Research shows that children three to five years old average fifty-four hours of TV-viewing time each week. The average pre-kindergartener spends more than 64 percent of his or her waking time before the television set"(10, p.75).

Barbara Fowles and Vivian Horner, Directors of Research for the Electric Company, produced by Children's Television Workshop, state:

> All of us concerned with understanding and educating young children must be concerned with the impact of this medium on their lives. The problem is that, in spite of all our good intentions, the pervasiveness of television in this country puts the researcher at a disadvantage. Television crept up on us, and before we were aware of its importance, it was everywhere. Simply put, perhaps simplistically, it is extremely difficult to examine the effects of an environmental variable on children when there are virtually no control subjects (in this case children not exposed to television) (6, p.98).

The bulk of current research on television and children pertains to violence on television and the relationship of television to minority and lower-income children (17).

As far back as 1954, the issue of the effect of television violence on human behavior was presented to the Congress of the United States by the late Senator Estes Kefauver, who headed the subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency.

> That committee launched hearings in response to mounting concern of parents and educators over the amount of time devoted to shows containing crime, brutality, sadism, and sex. Based on the testimony, the committee issued a report indicating that it felt television violence could be potentially harmful to young viewers (20, p.233).

Much of what is known about children's television today is derived from three years of research and analysis made by Schramm, Lyle and Parker between 1958 and 1960. This was the first full-length study of television and

North American children. These researchers conducted a total of eleven studies involving 6,000 children and 2,000 parents in five different locations. They used questionnaires, interviews and diaries to study the relationship between age, socio-economic class and viewing behavior to determine the uses children made of television (18).

Wilbur Schramm and his colleagues concluded that

> For some children, under some conditions, some television is harmful. For other children under the same conditions, or for the same children under other conditions, it may be beneficial. For most children under most conditions, most television is probably neither harmful or particularly beneficial (13, p.11).

Newer and more sophisticated studies have appeared within the twenty-three independent research projects conducted under the general auspices of the Surgeon General's Scientific Advisory Committee on Television and Social Behavior between the years of 1969 to 1971 (21).

The summary volume of the Surgeon General's Report states that we cannot conclusively measure effects of television,

> . . . how much contribution to the violence of our society is made by extensive violent television viewing by our youth? The evidence (or more accurately, the difficulty of finding evidence) suggests that the effect is small compared with many other possible causes, such as parental attitudes or knowledge of and experience with the real violence of our society (20, p.7).

Throughout the research literature available today are references to the experimental studies of Albert Bandura. Bandura's theory and research provide the most persuasive evidence that television can alter behavior (13). In his series of studies, Bandura found that preschool children showed more aggression toward a vinyl Bobo doll after they had been exposed to prior displays of aggressive behavior by real adults, by adults on film, and by cartoon characters (2, p.464). Siegel refers to Bandura's studies:

> . . . pioneering investigations of Bandura in the early 1960's demonstrated that children can acquire new responses through observation and imitation, without external reinforcement and without extensive rehearsal and practice. This occurs when they are observing and imitating filmed or videotaped models, just as it occurs when they are observing and imitating live models in a face-to-face situation (19, p.18).

Norman Morris in his book, Television's Child, quotes Bandura as saying, "The Bobo doll experiment proved only that aggression can be learned." But, according to Morris, many people have interpreted Bandura's study to imply that watching TV violence leads to violent behavior, and that is not what he was stating (14, p.113).

The Boston-based organization, Action for Children's Television (ACT), believes there is violence on children's television because it sells products. This well known and successful political action organization has conducted content analyses of children's TV programs and of their commercials. It has also commissioned studies on mothers' attitudes toward children's television programs and commercials, and the treatment of black and other minority groups on children's television programs on the three commercial networks (6, 13).

As part of the Surgeon General's Report, Jack Lyle and Heidi R. Hoffman of the University of California at Los Angeles, conducted a replication of the Schramm research, entitled "Children's Use of Television and Other Media." Data were collected from 1600 students in the first, sixth and tenth grades and from mothers of first graders. The community selected was a working-class community with a mixed economy based on heavy industry and agriculture. Of the 21,000 residents, 16 percent were Mexican-American and 6 percent black (12, p.130).

Lyle and Hoffman compare one of Schramm's findings with one of their own:

> The authors of the 1959 studies remarked on how quickly children seemed to have adopted television viewing as normal behavior, to take its availability for granted. The younger generation of 1970 appeared to take television even more for granted. It is there; they expect it to be there, and they most likely will make extensive use of it during any given day (12, p.139).

Viewing Preferences and Viewing Habits

Wilbur Schramm and his associates, as well as Lyle and Hoffman, agree that children begin viewing television at a very early age. Schramm states:

> The first direct experience with television typically comes at age two. Chances are, the child will eavesdrop on a program someone has tuned in. But he soon begins to explore the world of television and to develop tastes and preferences of his own (18, p.24).
> . . . .
> By the time they are three years old they are already committed to favorite programs. A little later they begin to sit with absorbed faces, lost in the events of the picture tube (18, p.57).

However, most research involved with children and television has not investigated children's earliest experiences with television. There seems to be little concern for a young child's viewing preferences or viewing habits. Studies have concentrated on school-age children and on adolescents. For example, out of the sixty research listings in Appendix B of the Report to the Surgeon General, only nine studies deal with young children. Of these, three studies involve children ages three to six; and two studies deal with aggressive behavior (20).

The remaining study, Lyle and Hoffman's "Explorations in Patterns of Television Viewing by Preschool-Age Children," bears more directly upon the concerns of the present study. Lyle and Hoffman selected 158 children to be interviewed within the nursery school or day care center. All interviews were conducted on an individual basis. The interview consisted of twenty-four questions, after which the child rested or stretched before attempting to identify the twenty-one photographs presented.

Lyle and Hoffman's study differs from the present one in several respects. The researchers did not use a random sample. Four-year-old children comprised approximately half the sample, while the remaining children were divided almost equally between three- and five-year-olds. Over half of the children were white, but sufficient numbers of blacks and Mexican-Americans were included to make comparisons possible.

Four of every ten children came from poor or welfare families, but the emphasis in the analysis was on the ethnic rather than the socioeconomic factor. Follow-up interviews were conducted with mothers of approximately half the children (12, pp.257-273).

The conclusions of Lyle and Hoffman's study are supportive of the present research. They found that responses of the three-, four- and five-year-olds "provide strong testimony to the fact that mass media -- and particularly television -- do play an important part in their lives, do claim large shares of the children's time"(12, p.269). Viewing was particularly heavy during afternoons and on Saturday mornings, but the majority of the children also watched on weekday mornings and in the evenings. The children generally had favorite programs and displayed abilities to identify television characters. Almost nine out of ten children could identify Fred Flintstone, and seven out of ten could identify Big Bird from Sesame Street.

Generally, then, the responses of the children and their mothers in the Lyle and Hoffman study, strongly support the thesis that much of the framework of a child's patterns of the use of television and their reactions to the television stimulus, has already begun taking shape before the child begins his formal education in the first grade (12, p.270).

Fantasy and Reality

Throughout the current literature, the importance of fantasy and reality in a young child's life is mentioned. In the Family Guide to Children's Television, Evelyn Kaye says, "Professionals who work with young children stress that one of the most important lessons a young child must learn is to distinguish between reality and fantasy"(9, p.52).

Psychiatrist Paul Syracuse believes that "Fantasizing is quite useful. It enables the child to discharge or accomplish through imagination what he is unable to do in reality"(14, p.16).

Another child psychiatrist, Irving Markowitz says, "With respect to television viewing a child has a fantasy when what he sees on the screen is not something he can identify with in his own personal life. That is the fantasy of a very young child"(14, p.16).

One of the most widely quoted sources for interpreting fantasy and reality in young children is Jean Piaget. Four- and five-year-old children are in Piaget's preoperational or representational stage. This stage, from about the age of two to about the age of six, includes the mastery of symbols, including those that occur in language, fantasy, play and dreams (5, 16).

In Piaget's own words:

> There are no "static" stages as such. Each is the fulfillment of something begun in the preceding one, and the beginning of something that will lead to the next. It is just as disastrous, moreover, to assume that a child has or has not reached a certain stage just because he is a certain age. The ages I have mentioned are only averages. Any child may be a year or so beyond or behind the average capabilities reached by most children his age (3, p.25).

David Elkind, who has studied and interpreted Piaget's works for many years, explains, "The possibility of an old woman who lives in a shoe, a gingerbread man who runs, and a candy house in the forest are not outside the range of possibility. For the young child, these fantasies are every bit as real as his father's rough beard and mommy's harsh voice"(4, p.38).

Many statements have been made about young children and fantasy and reality, but very little research has been conducted in connection with the preschool age child's ability to distinguish fantasy from reality in relation to television programs.

Wilbur Schramm and his colleagues, in their 1959 study, pointed out advantages and disadvantages of television as a conveyor of reality experiences.

> One of its advantages is that it can convey information earlier than most media. . . . .
> Television can present information which would be much harder to carry through pictures or sound or print alone. . . . .
> Television is in a unique position to enlarge the environment of viewers. TV cameras can go where few of their viewers can. They carry the young child out of his family circle and his immediate neighborhood. . . . .
> But not all its characteristics are favorable. . .
> Watching television the viewer cannot set his own pace. . . . .
> The viewer is at the mercy of a schedule. . . . . .
> Let us remind ourselves that very little of the information learned comes from seeking. Much of it is incidental learning, usually gained as a by-product of fantasy materials (18, pp.66-67).

During the early 1970's, Rosalind Gould conducted a study of fantasy behavior in children three, four, and five years old. Although not related to children and television research, this study is relevant to the related literature. Gould's study supported Piaget in finding that,

> Cognitive growth trends in fantasy materials are similar to those evident in reality-directed thought. Both generally show simultaneously a progressive increase in complexity and coherence of ideas (language), and in the uses of reality information (7, p.16). . . .
> Fantasy expressions in early childhood selectively and significantly reflect individual and developmental aspects of children's experiences of the real world, and

> inner psychological processes which mediate and evolve from these (7, p.26).

Gould's study implies that "fantasy expression" relates directly to a child's ability to distinguish between make-believe and real.

During May, 1973, Bradley Greenberg and Byron Reeves gathered data from eight elementary school classes, third through sixth grades. Using respondents, all white, from a wide variety of socio-economic backgrounds, they measured the children's perceptions of reality in television at three levels of abstraction: TV in general, television content areas, and specific television characters. A portion of their findings states:

> To the extent the child is asked more and more specifically about television content, perceptions of the reality of the content phenomena are more pervasive . . . . The people, the actors, the heroines are very alive and realistic to the child viewer (8, p.20).

In his book, <u>The Uses of Enchantment</u>, Bruno Bettelheim gives insight into a young child's perception of fantasy and reality.

> To the child, there is no clear line separating objects from living things, and whatever has life very much like our own. If we do not understand what rocks and trees and animals have to tell us, the reason is that we are not sufficiently attuned to them. To the child trying to understand the world, it seems reasonable to expect answers from those objects which arouse his curiosity (1, p.19).

Summary

Rose Mukerji of Brooklyn College, The City University of New York, has researched the use of television in the home in the early childhood years. Her results show that characteristics of a child's play mirror some characteristics of television. She explains,

> A child's play is intensely concentrated and focused; he honestly does not hear you when you call him. Television technique can concentrate on an image so that it fills the screen with the eye of a grasshopper, and you are captured by that image. . . . A child's play is full of sound and action. TV, too, is all sound and motion. . . . When a child plays, he is a terrifying monster one moment and the victim of that same monster the next. But, he can stop when wants to — so he is psychologically safe. *He* is in control; that is why the act of play is so crucial to him. As for television, it may look like the real thing, but it is *not your real life*. There is always a degree of psychological distance between those TV images and you (15, p.19).

While there is a wealth of research information available on children and television, very little relates directly to the young child's television preferences, viewing habits, and the ability to distinguish fantasy from reality. With this study, it is hoped that a contribution will be made toward filling part of the void in the literature pertaining to young children and television.

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CHAPTER III

PROCEDURES FOR CONDUCTING THE STUDY

This study focused on the television viewing preferences, television viewing habits, and the ability of four- and five-year-old middle-income white girls and boys to distinguish fantasy from reality in selected television programs.

Selection of the Sample

Sixty four- and five-year-old children (thirty girls and thirty boys) participated in the study. They were enrolled in three private preschools and day care centers selected from middle-income white urban and suburban areas.

The directors of four preschools and day care centers and the principal of one elementary school in a suburban public school district were contacted by telephone initially. They were then sent a letter, reproduced in Appendix I, requesting written permission for the researcher to visit their schools and centers. The letter stated that the purpose of the visit would be to interview a random selection of four- and five-year-old children to determine their television viewing preferences, television viewing habits, and their ability to distinguish fantasy from reality in selected television programs. The children selected were to be interviewed twice by the researcher.

Written permission was secured from appropriate personnel at three private preschools and day care centers to interview four- and five-year-old children who were attending their schools and centers. One private center and the public elementary school did not grant permission for their children to be used in this study.

Questionnaires

A questionnaire was devised which provided the desired information regarding the television program preferences and television viewing habits of the four- and five-year-old children. This first questionnaire, reproduced in Appendix II, was pre-tested at a Community College Parent- Child Study Center on September 29, 1976. Two four-year-olds, one boy and one girl, and two five-year-olds, one boy and one girl, were interviewed by the researcher. The questionnaire did not require any revision.

During the months of October, November and December, 1976, sixty children from the three private preschools and day care centers were interviewed, using the first questionnaire. The children chosen to be interviewed were randomly selected from the teacher's class roll at each preschool and center. The second girl, the third boy, the fourth girl, the fifth boy, the sixth girl, the seventh boy, the ninth girl, the tenth boy, the twelfth girl, and the thirteenth boy listed on each teacher's class roll of four- and five-year-old children were selected. If classes were small, the last boy and the last girl listed on the classroom roll were used as the twelfth girl and the thirteenth boy.

The random selection process yielded four interviews that could not be used. These did not fit the criteria of age or race, and one child was retarded. In order to achieve a balanced selection, the random selection process was extended until a total of sixty children were interviewed and evenly distributed into four groups of fifteen four-year-old girls, fifteen four-year-old boys, fifteen five-year-old girls, and fifteen five-year-old boys.

Interviewing Process

At each of the three preschools and day care centers, the researcher was introduced to all of the children in each class before personally taking the selected child to a private room where the first interview was conducted.

The child was told by the teacher that the researcher wanted to talk with him or her for a few minutes. Television was never mentioned to the child before the interview took place. The child was made comfortable in a chair, while the researcher sat in another chair next to the child. As the child's name was written on the first questionnaire, the researcher explained that questions would be asked and that everything the child said would be written down by the researcher. Each interview lasted approximately twenty minutes. The researcher personally took the child back to the classroom after the interview was completed.

As part of the first questionnaire, the children were asked to name the television programs they watched. The preferred television programs were determined by identifying the program most frequently mentioned by the sixty children who were interviewed. The preferred television programs were important in the development of the second questionnaire. By using eight of the most preferred programs, a second questionnaire was devised. The purpose of this questionnaire was to determine if the children were able to distinguish fantasy from reality in relation to the preferred television programs. This questionnaire is reproduced in Appendix III.

An assumption was made that the children might perceive the cartoon television programs they mentioned to be fantasy, while the television programs with live actors might be seen as reality. Therefore, three programs using animated cartoon characters were chosen from those most preferred by the children, and five programs with live actors were selected from the most preferred list.

The first program selected for use in the second questionnaire was Sesame Street. This television program was popular with the majority of the children who had been interviewed. The second program used was Six Million Dollar Man. This was one of the most frequently mentioned television programs in prime time, broadcast between 6:30 p.m. and 10:00 p.m. in the Central Time Zone. Another television program chosen was The Flintstones, one of the most popular cartoons. This particular program has been broadcast by the local independent television station for as long as the subjects have been alive. Another most preferred program was Gilligan's Island, and it was selected for the second questionnaire because many of the children indicated they liked Gilligan, the main character. Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck and Goofy were identified both as individual programs and as participants in The Wonderful World of Disney. They were selected for the same reason that Popeye was selected.

These cartoons, easily identified, could be used as major indicators in the fantasy/reality questionnaire. Bewitched, a program with live actors portraying witches, was another frequently mentioned television program. This program was chosen for the obvious intermixing of fantasy and reality in the storyline. In Adam-12, the police officers who are depicted, are always shown doing the work of actual policemen. With live actors performing real-life activities, this presented a special fantasy-reality situation for use in the second questionnaire.

Pictures of characters from each of the eight preferred television programs were obtained from the promotion directors of three television stations in Dallas.

The same children from the three private preschools and day care centers were interviewed the second time using the second questionnaire. The interviewing was completed during the months of December, 1976, and January, 1977. Nine children from the original sixty subjects were not interviewed. Eight of them had moved out of the city and the ninth child was ill. Thus, a total of fifty-one, girls and boys, four and five years of age were interviewed using the second questionnaire.

The researcher personally took each child to a private room and made the child comfortable in a chair next to the researcher's chair. As the child's name was written on the second questionnaire, the child was asked if he or she knew what "make-believe" meant. If the child was able to explain, the child was then asked if he or she knew what "real" meant. If the child was able to explain, the researcher opened the notebook to the first picture and began asking the questions from the second questionnaire. If any child did not know what "make-believe" meant, the researcher substituted other words, such as, "pretend" or "play-like", until the child seemed to understand. The word "true" was substituted for "real" in cases when the child did not seem to know what "real" meant.

The pictures were placed in a notebook, and were arranged with one picture from each preferred television program on each page. However, there was one program which had more than one picture. The Wonderful World of Disney had two pictures showing Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, and Goofy.

Analyzing the Data

All of the data, reported in Chapter IV, were compiled through individual interviews with the sixty children, four and five years of age.

The interviews yielded both numerical data and informal comments. The numerical data were assembled by the addition of similar responses and the derivation of percentages to indicate the perceptions of the children in the sample. These findings may be found in the tables in Chapter IV.

The method of interviewing the children themselves, and not their teachers or parents, was an important part of the procedures for this study. This approach carried with it the assumption that four- and five-year-old children could verbalize their television viewing habits. Furthermore, it was assumed that four- and five-year-old children were capable of expressing whether or not television programs were make-believe or real to them.

CHAPTER IV

REPORTING AND ANALYZING THE DATA

Children develop program preferences and viewing habits almost as soon as they begin viewing television. This survey confirms the earlier findings, cited in Chapters I and II, that four- and five-year-old children watch a great deal of television. This study also reveals that these children have strong program preferences. They can articulate their preferences and discuss their viewing habits, and they did so with enthusiasm and with a remarkable degree of sophistication in the interviews conducted as a part of this survey.

Viewing Preferences

All of the sixty children interviewed reported that they watched television regularly. The children, thirty girls and thirty boys, were asked which programs they watched. All of their responses were recorded by the researcher, and program preferences were identified through the process described in Chapter III.

The television programs these four- and five-year-old children preferred are in four major categories; in order of preference, they are cartoons, action-adventure programs, situation comedies, and children's educational programs. Table I shows the viewing preferences of the children divided into program categories. Table II lists individual programs in the four major categories with the numbers of times the programs were named by four-year-old and five-year-old children. Table III lists individual programs in the four major categories with the numbers of times the programs were named by girls and by boys.

All of the children interviewed liked cartoons, as shown in Table I. The children named eighty cartoons in this category, combining the term "cartoons" generally with the name of specific cartoon programs. Together, the cartoons account for 32.1 percent of all programs named. A total of 249 programs were named, including the thirty "names" unidentifiable as specific programs or categories. Thus, a program named by 100 percent of the children, a total of sixty responses, would rate 24.1 percent of the programs named. On the average, each child named 4.15 programs.

The cartoon program Popeye and the program Banana Splits were the most popular cartoon programs specifically named. Next favored were The Bugs Bunny Roadrunner Hour and The Flintstones. Boys tended to be more specific than girls in naming cartoon programs. The comparison of programs named by boys and girls is shown in Table II.

TABLE I

TELEVISION VIEWING PREFERENCES BY PROGRAM CATEGORY

Program Category	Number of Times Named by Children					
	Age 4	Age 5	Girls	Boys	Total	
	#	#	#	#	#	%*
CARTOONS	37	43	32	48	80	32.1
ACTION-ADVENTURE	12	24	11	25	36	14.4
SITUATION COMEDIES	15	19	10	24	34	13.7
CHILDREN'S EDUCATIONAL	13	18	22	9	31	12.4
CHILDREN'S NON-CARTOON	6	8	5	9	14	5.6
SPECIALS	7	4	8	3	11	4.4
SPORTS	7	2	2	7	9	3.6
COMEDY VARIETY	1	3	4	0	4	1.6
OTHERS (UNIDENTIFIABLE)	16	14	15	15	30	12.2
TOTALS	114	135	109	140	249	100.0

* #=Number, %=Percentage of the total number of responses

In the category of action-adventure programs, which was the second most popular category with 14.4 percent of all named programs, the three most popular programs were Wonder Woman, Adam-12, and The Six Million Dollar Man. The boys in the survey named action-adventure programs almost twice as often as the girls. Action-adventure programs were also twice as popular with five-year-olds as with four-year-olds, as shown in Table III.

Situation comedies were preferred more by the boys than by the girls (Table II). Gilligan's Island was the most frequently named program, while Bewitched was second. This third most named category, situation comedy, had 13.7 percent of the total responses (Table I).

Programs in the category of children's educational programs were named in 12.4 percent of all responses. Among these programs Sesame Street was the most popular and Misterogers Neighborhood was the second most popular program. Children's educational programs had a higher response among girls than boys (Table II). Five-year-olds preferred children's educational programs more than four-year-olds (Table III).

For a detailed listing of all programs named by the children in the survey, see Appendix IV. It should not be misinterpreted as an indication of the ability of the children to recognize television programs or the

TABLE II

TELEVISION VIEWING PREFERENCES BY SPECIFIC PROGRAM
WITHIN FOUR MAJOR CATEGORIES:
COMPARISON OF AGES FOUR AND FIVE

CATEGORY/Program	Children Naming Program		
	Age 4	Age 5	Total
CARTOON			
"Cartoons"	14	14	28
Popeye	5	6	11
Bugs Bunny/Roadrunner	7	1	8
Flintstones	3	5	8
Felix the Cat	2	5	7
Clue Club	1	0	1
Superfriends	1	2	3
Jabberjaw	1	0	1
Tom and Jerry	0	1	1
Speed Racer	0	1	1
Banana Splits	3	8	11
Total for Category	37	43	80
ACTION-ADVENTURE			
Wonder Woman	4	4	8
Adam-12	3	5	8
Batman	2	2	4
Six Million Dollar Man	1	6	7
Bionic Woman	1	4	5
Gunsmoke	1	3	4
Total for Category	12	24	36
SITUATION COMEDY			
My Three Sons	0	2	2
Bewitched	3	5	8
Gilligan's Island	4	5	9
Dick Van Dyke	2	2	4
I Love Lucy	3	4	7
Slam Bang Theatre	2	1	3
Hogan's Heroes	1	0	1
Total for Category	16	19	35
CHILDREN'S EDUCATIONAL			
Sesame Street	7	5	12
Misterogers Neighborhood	3	4	7
Zoom	1	3	4
Captain Kangaroo	1	0	1
Electric Company	1	4	5
Peppermint Place	0	1	1
Dusty's Treehouse	0	1	1
Total for Category	13	18	31

characters portrayed in them. There will be further discussion of their ability to recognize television programs later in this chapter.

While the children were also asked to "name the program you like best," the information elicited by this question was less reliable because many of the children seemed unable to comprehend the specific meaning of the question, responding only by naming more programs. Because some children answered with the name of one of the programs already named, while others named additional programs, and still others gave no response, this question was not used in determining program preference. A Table showing responses to this question is in Appendix V.

Sex Role Stereotyping

One pattern which emerged in the researcher's review of program preferences was that of sex role stereotyping in programs named by girls and boys. Individual programs provide several examples. Popeye was named by boys almost three times as often as girls (Table II). This cartoon shows the male figure as the strong one, with an emphasis on muscular achievement. On the other hand, Bugs Bunny and Roadrunner are relatively neutral as far as male-female roles are concerned, and there is no difference in the number of times named by boys and by girls. In the

TABLE III

TELEVISION VIEWING PREFERENCES BY SPECIFIC PROGRAM WITHIN FOUR MAJOR CATEGORIES: COMPARISON OF GIRLS AND BOYS

CATEGORY/Program	Children Naming Program		
	Girls	Boys	Total
CARTOON			
"Cartoons"	14	14	28
Popeye	3	8	11
Bugs Bunny/Roadrunner	4	4	8
Flintstones	2	6	8
Felix the Cat	2	5	7
Clue Club	0	1	1
Superfriends	2	1	3
Jabberjaw	0	1	1
Tom and Jerry	0	1	1
Speed Racer	0	1	1
Banana Splits	5	6	11
Total for Category	32	48	80
ACTION-ADVENTURE			
Wonder Woman	3	5	8
Adam-12	3	5	8
Batman	1	3	4
Six Million Dollar Man	2	5	7
Bionic Woman	1	4	5
Gunsmoke	1	3	4
Total for Category	11	25	36
SITUATION COMEDY			
My Three Sons	0	2	2
Bewitched	5	3	8
Gilligan's Island	2	7	9
Dick Van Dyke	1	3	4
I Love Lucy	2	5	7
Slam Bang Theatre	0	3	3
Hogan's Heroes	0	1	1
Total for Category	10	24	35
CHILDREN'S EDUCATIONAL			
Sesame Street	10	2	12
Misterogers Neighborhood	7	0	7
Zoom	3	1	4
Captain Kangaroo	0	1	1
Electric Company	2	3	5
Peppermint Place	0	1	1
Dusty's Treehouse	0	1	1
Total for Category	22	9	31

cartoon, <u>Felix the Cat</u>, Felix is identified as a male capable of mastering any predicament. Boys named this cartoon more than twice as often as girls, while girls mentioned it only twice. <u>The Flintstones</u> cartoon, named by boys three times as often as by girls, places the female in the traditional housewife role.

With reference to the children's educational programs, in which there is less action and no exaggerated male dominance, girls named these programs almost three times more frequently than boys. One program, <u>Sesame Street</u>, was named by the girls five times more than by the boys. <u>Misterogers Neighborhood</u> was named only by girls.

In other categories, a similar pattern continued. Boys favored action-adventure programs more than girls. While boys named situation comedy programs more frequently than girls, the specific program <u>Bewitched</u>, in which the female lead is clearly dominant over her husband, drew more responses from girls than from boys. In the same pattern, boys named sports programs more often than girls.

While interesting in itself, this pattern tends also to support a conclusion that four- and five-year-old children actively select the television programs they watch rather than watching at random. The first questionnaire was designed, however, to determine much more directly such factors as viewing times, viewing environment and parental supervision in television viewing.

Viewing Habits

The children interviewed in connection with this study perceived that they were supervised by their parents in television viewing. Table IV shows the responses to questions about parental supervision.

TABLE IV

PARENTAL SUPERVISION OF TELEVISION VIEWING AS PERCEIVED BY CHILDREN

Question	Response	4-yr-olds #	4-yr-olds %	5-yr-olds #	5-yr-olds %	Girls #	Girls %	Boys #	Boys %	Total #	Total %
"Does Mom or Dad tell you when you can turn on the television set?"	Yes	23	77	17	57	25	83	15	50	40	67
	No	7	23	13	43	5	17	15	50	20	33
"Does Mom watch television with you?"	Yes	25	83	28	93	30	100	23	77	53	88
	No	5	17	2	7	0	0	7	23	7	12
"Does Dad watch television with you?"	Yes	27	90	26	87	26	87	27	90	53	88
	No	3	10	3*	10	3*	10	3	10	6*	10
		N=30		N=30		N=30		N=30		N=60	

*One five-year-old girl reported that her father was deceased; thus, these percentages do not add to 100.

When asked if "Mom" or "Dad" told them when they can turn on the television set, 67 percent of the children reported that their parents did exercise this control. However, the five-year-olds reported less supervision than did the four-year-olds, and boys reported less supervision than girls.

Also, almost all the children interviewed perceived that their parents watched television with them. As one four-year-old girl expressed it, "It comes on loud, and I'm afraid I'll disturb Mommy and Daddy, so Mommy turns it on when she wakes up." Asked if his dad watches television with him, a four-year-old boy replied, "Yes, we watch football and eat popcorn." A five-year-old boy recalled his dad's viewing with him in this way: "Dad just turns on the TV by himself. He knows he can; he's the boss of it. He bought it."

The times of day when children watch television seem also to depend on parental supervision. Responses given by the children interviewed seem to indicate that their parents allow them to watch freely those programs designed for children and perhaps considered "safe." A four-year-old girl said, "Mom and Dad tell me when cartoons are on, I can turn on the television set anytime I want to." A four-year-old boy answered, "Yes, they will let me watch everything on cartoons."

Questions asking the times of day and the days of the week when they watched television programs seemed to confuse the children in the sample. Perhaps this was due to the wording of the questions, combined with inherent characteristics of the stage of development in four- and five-year-olds. Many children at these ages have not yet learned to "tell time," and the days of the week are not yet fully understood in their sequence. Many of the four-year-olds answered by saying, "It's hard to remember," or "I don't know that." One four-year-old boy volunteered, "On church day, I watch Six Million Dollar Man."

Five-year-olds seemed to understand the linking of certain television programs with certain times of day better, but they often were unable to connect specific programs with certain days of the week. One five-year-old boy, for example, asked, "When is Saturday?" Another child kept saying, "I forget."

For these reasons, the questions designed to determine times and days of viewing TV programs did not produce usable information. However, it was possible to arrive at a general estimation of viewing times by identifying the broadcast times of the programs mentioned by children responding to the question, "What television programs do you watch?" These broadcast times were determined by referring to broadcast schedules published at the times the interviews were conducted. Both the programs and the viewing times are listed in Appendix IV.

The primary viewing times and days thus interpolated from programs mentioned were Saturday mornings from 7:00 a.m. until 11:00 a.m., Monday through Friday afternoons from 3:00 p.m. until 7:00 p.m., and Monday through Friday mornings from 8:00 a.m. until 11:00 a.m. Program schedules falling in other time periods were mentioned, but they were scattered and revealed no pattern of viewing times and days.

In an effort to determine the degree to which four- and five-year-old children focus their attention on television programs, the researcher asked each child two questions: "What else do you do when you watch television?" and "Do you play with any toys while you are watching television?"

The answers to the first question were varied, with children obviously giving various interpretations to the phrase "what else." Some of the responses were:

> We eat.
>
> I rock on the rocky horse.
>
> I sit on the couch and have my quiet time by myself. It's fun.
>
> I get my pillow and blanket and snuggle up and watch TV.
>
> I wiggle around.
>
> Sometimes I fall asleep.

When the second question, including the suggestion of toys, was asked, the responses were almost all affirmative, as shown in Table V.

Seventy-eight percent of the children said they played with toys while watching television, frequently mentioning such toys as dolls, coloring books, building blocks, cars and stuffed animals. Four-year-olds reported playing with toys while watching television to a significantly greater degree than five-year-olds. Ninety-three percent of the four-year-olds responded affirmatively to the question, as compared to 63 percent of the five-year-olds. Parental supervision was in evidence in these responses, too. One five-year-old girl answered the question by saying, "No, 'cause our mother won't let us bring toys in there [to the living room]." A five-year-old boy replied, "No, I can't play with them [toys] in the den, only in my room.

TABLE V

CHILDREN'S PLAY WHILE VIEWING TELEVISION

Question	Response	4-yr-olds #	4-yr-olds %	5-yr-olds #	5-yr-olds %	Girls #	Girls %	Boys #	Boys %	Total #	Total %
"Do you play with any toys while you are watching television?"	Yes	28	93	19	63	24	80	23	77	47	78
	No	2	7	11	37	6	20	7	23	13	22
		N=30		N=30		N=30		N=30		N=60	

The responses to the question "Do you watch TV with the light on or the light off?" proved interesting. Twenty-two children said they watched television with the light on. Another twenty-eight replied, "On and off."

Ten children reported that they viewed television with the light off. Of those who said they watched television with the light "on and off," five added that they sometimes turned the light off so that they could pretend "it's a movie." Seemingly, then, these children consciously controlled a part of the environment in which they watched television. In other words, it seems they played with the television set as another type of toy.

There was no significant data gathered from the other questions in the first questionnaire. However, the relatively few responses which were elicited were sometimes revealing, sometimes delightful. One four-year-old girl explained quite clearly why her sister did not help select the television programs they watched: "Jennifer doesn't crawl yet; she can't choose!"

Fantasy and Reality

Data yielded by the second questionnaire, administered during a second interview with fifty-one of the original sixty children, showed a significant developmental growth in fantasy-reality discrimination in the five-year-old children as compared with that of the four-year-old children who were interviewed. This finding is supportive of the view of Barbara M. and Philip G. Newman, who write about the child moving from the pre-operational into the concrete operational stage with an emerging appreciation of reality,

> This child is far more skilled than the toddler in separating fantasy from real life. The child is able to differentiate those television programs that represent real-world events, such as the news, sports and variety shows, from programs that are dramatic representations of fictional situations (2, p.143).

This study did not require children to compare news, sports and variety shows to fictional presentations; the children interviewed in this survey did show an ability to distinguish between characters and actions in fictional presentations which were "make-believe" and "real" in the general sense of being impossible or possible in actual life.

In the second questionnaire, each child was shown a series of eight photographs of characters from various television programs and asked in the case of each, "Who is this?" or "Who are they?" The purpose of this question was to provide a basis for asking subsequent questions relating to fantasy and reality. The children were able to identify correctly the characters in 86 percent of the instances. The four-year-olds were correct 80 percent of the time in their responses, while the five-year-olds were correct in an overwhelming 92 percent of the instances.

One sub-group, that of four-year-old girls, was less than 50 percent correct in identifying the picture of _The Six Million Dollar Man._ Results of this first question are shown in Table VI.

TABLE VI

CORRECT AND INCORRECT IDENTIFICATION OF PICTURES OF TV CHARACTERS BY CHILDREN

Picture Shown	Response	Responses from Children Age 4 #	%	Age 5 #	%	Responses from Children Girls #	%	Boys #	%	Total Responses #	%*
(1) Big Bird, Sesame Street	C	24	92	25	100	25	96	24	96	49	96
	I	2	8	0	0	1	4	1	4	2	4
(2) Steve Austin, The Six Million Dollar Man	C	15	58	18	72	12	46	21	84	33	65
	I	11	42	7	28	14	54	4	16	18	35
(3) Wilma, The Flintstones	C	18	70	21	84	20	77	19	76	39	76
	I	8	30	4	16	6	23	6	24	12	24
(4) All characters in the cast of Gilligan's Island	C	19	73	21	84	19	73	21	84	40	78
	I	7	27	4	16	7	27	4	16	11	22
(5) Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck and Goofy, Wonderful World of Disney	C	26	100	25	100	26	100	25	100	51	100
	I	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
(6) Samantha and Endora, Bewitched	C	19	73	24	96	21	81	22	88	43	84
	I	7	27	1	4	5	19	3	12	8	16
(7) Popeye, Popeye	C	24	92	25	100	24	92	25	100	49	96
	I	2	8	0	0	2	8	0	0	2	4
(8) Officers Reed and Malloy, Adam-12	C	21	81	24	96	22	85	23	92	45	88
	I	5	19	1	4	4	15	2	8	6	12
		N=26		N=25		N=26		N=25		N=51	

*C=Correct Identification, I=Incorrect Identification, #=Number, %=Percent of N.

Three questions were asked in an effort to determine the degree to which the children were able to discriminate between fantasy and reality regarding the characters in the pictures. The first question was, "Is he/she make-believe or is he/she real?" The second was, "What he/she does, could this really happen?" The third was, "Does he/she do make-believe or real things?" The second and third questions used slightly different words to elicit the same type of response. However, the results of the second question were erratic, with a large proportion of the children giving "don't know" responses and reacting with obvious confusion. The responses to the first and third questions fell into patterns resembling one another, with fewer "don't know" responses. Therefore, the second question was discarded. with the first and third questions used in this analysis.

The answers to the first fantasy-reality question, "Is he/she make-believe or is he/she real?" are reported in Table VII. In response to this question, posed eight times for each child (once for each of eight pictures), five-year-olds displayed considerably greater tendencies to label characters as "make-believe" than did four-year-olds. Four-year-olds identified characters as "make-believe" in 46 percent of all cases, while the corresponding figure for five-year-olds was 66 percent. At the same time, there was a negligible difference between girls and boys.

TABLE VII

IDENTIFICATION OF TV CHARACTERS
BY CHILDREN
AS MAKE-BELIEVE OR REAL

Picture Shown	Response	Responses from Children				Responses from Children				Total Responses	
		Age 4		Age 5		Girls		Boys			
		#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%*
(1) Big Bird, *Sesame Street*	MB	14	54	22	88	18	69	18	72	36	70
	R	10	38	2	8	7	27	5	20	12	24
	DK**	2	8	1	4	1	4	2	8	3	6
(2) Steve Austin, *The Six Million Dollar Man*	MB	7	27	13	52	6	23	14	56	20	39
	R	7	27	5	20	6	23	6	24	12	24
	DK	12	46	7	28	14	54	5	20	19	37
(3) Wilma, *The Flintstones*	MB	19	73	17	68	18	69	18	72	36	70
	R	2	8	3	12	3	12	2	8	5	10
	DK	5	19	5	20	5	19	5	20	10	20
(4) All Characters in the cast of *Gilligan's Island*	MB	6	23	12	48	8	31	10	40	18	35
	R	15	58	7	28	11	42	11	44	22	43
	DK	5	19	6	24	7	27	4	16	11	22
(5) Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck and Goofy, *Wonderful World of Disney*	MB	21	80	21	84	24	92	18	72	42	82
	R	3	12	4	16	2	8	5	20	7	14
	DK	2	8	0	0	0	0	2	8	2	4
(6) Samantha and Endora, *Bewitched*	MB	8	31	17	68	12	46	13	52	25	49
	R	13	50	7	28	10	39	10	40	20	39
	DK	5	19	1	4	4	15	2	8	6	12
(7) Popeye, *Popeye*	MB	15	57	21	84	20	77	16	64	36	70
	R	9	35	2	8	4	15	7	28	11	22
	DK	2	8	2	8	2	8	2	8	4	8
(8) Officers Reed and Malloy, *Adam-12*	MB	6	23	8	32	8	31	6	24	14	27
	R	16	62	13	52	14	54	15	60	29	57
	DK	4	15	4	16	4	15	4	16	8	16
		N=26		N=25		N=26		N=25		N=51	

* #=Number, %=Percent
**MB=Make-Believe, R=Real
DK=Didn't Know

Note the difference between four-year-olds and five-year-olds in relationship to the first picture. Eighty-eight percent of the five-year-old children perceived Big Bird of *Sesame Street* to be make-believe, as compared with only 54 percent of the four-year-olds. When asked to "tell about it," the children were quite able to articulate their perceptions. A four-year-old boy said, "He [Big Bird] talks. A man is inside talking for him. The man moves around inside a costume. The man is that tall. He walks, but not real steps." A five-year-old girl said, "He talks like he's not supposed to. He snores and he's not supposed to. Only people snore."

There is a noticeable difference between the four-year-olds and the five-year-olds in their reactions to the second picture, as well. Only 27 percent of the four-year-olds thought that *The Six Million Dollar Man* was make-believe, while 52 percent of the five-year-olds thought he was make-believe. The twelve "don't know" reactions to the picture of Lee Majors, *The Six Million Dollar Man*, among four-year-olds for this picture, must be understood in the context of the identification of the character himself (Table VI). It is logical to expect that children who didn't recognize the character would be unable to express an opinion as to whether the character was make-believe or real.

Among those who did recognize him, boys had a greater tendency to identify The Six Million Dollar Man as make-believe than the girls. Two of the children who had this response were among several in the survey who left no doubt of the clarity of their understanding. A five-year-old girl remarked, "He sometimes can break steel. He's bionic and there's not such a thing as bionic." A five-year-old seeing the picture, reacted in this way: "Did you take a picture of Lee Majors? That's his real name. He has a moustache now."

A similar pattern continued with the other pictures. The fourth picture, showing the characters in the program, Gilligan's Island, was identified as make-believe by 23 percent of the four-year-olds and 48 percent of the five-year-olds. A four-year-old girl said, "The people [on Gilligan's Island] are real. Stuff they do is make-believe." A five-year-old boy said, "They're really on television with costumes."

The sixth picture, depicting Samantha and her mother from the program Bewitched, presented the children with a problem not unlike that of The Six Million Dollar Man. The leading characters in both programs appear to be ordinary people in realistic settings, except that both have supernatural powers. Steve Austin is "bionic" and

Samantha and her mother are endowed with the ability to use "witchcraft." It was thought that these programs would be the most confusing to four- and five-year-old children trying to sort out fantasy and reality.

The program, Bewitched, revealed most clearly the difference between four-year-old and five-year-old children in regard to fantasy-reality and the implied growth taking place during that developmental stage. Half of the four-year-olds said they thought Samantha was real, whereas 68 percent of the five-year-olds said the character was make-believe. Among the four-year-olds was a boy who stated simply, "She's a witch. She can change things." Among the five-year-olds, a girl said, "There are no witches around here." Discussing the "witchcraft" on the program, a four-year-old girl explained, "Their magic is make-believe," while a five-year-old boy went into a more complete explanation:

> Nobody could do magic. [Pause] Yes they could. I know James. He does magic. She [on Bewitched] can make mud pies come into her hand. Make her hair and clothes different. Not the same kind of magic James does.

The cartoon, Popeye, was expected to present little difficulty for the children in fantasy-reality. Like Mickey Mouse and other cartoons, the programs include no photographs of actual people or actual settings. The characters regularly perform impossible feats. As child psychologist Irving Markowitz observed,

> A child can look at a cartoon and know that it is not real. Even the youngest children have had some experience drawing or using crayons, and when they view a cartoon on television they see it as a drawing that moves. . . . The child can look around at his mother and say to himself, "She is real, and this thing on the TV set -- this cartoon -- is not like my mother; therefore, it is not real" (1, p.17).

The results in this study were as expected. Only 35 percent of the four-year-olds and 8 percent of the five-year-olds perceived _Popeye_ as being real. His amazing powers were also seen as make-believe for one five-year-old boy who explained, "Spinach doesn't make you strong in a hurry."

The final picture was of the two officers portrayed in _Adam-12_. Whereas _Popeye_ and other cartoons were expected to seem to be make-believe to the children, _Adam-12_ was expected to seem to be real. The characters are portrayed as ordinary policemen performing the same duties as policemen in any city -- working traffic, answering routine calls, and from time to time arresting people, and sending them to jail. A majority of both four-year-olds and five-year-olds identified the police officers in _Adam-12_ as real.

However, the comments of several children in response to the request, "Tell me about them," indicated an understanding of the difference between reality on television and reality in the world around them:

> The men are real. The cars are real. I think they use play handcuffs, but they wear real police suits. [Four-year-old girl.]

> Real, but they're just actors. There are policemen in this town that do the same thing. [This four-year-old boy then proceeded to quote the interviewer her rights: "You have the right to remain silent," etc.]

> They do what any normal policeman would do. They get crooks. [Five-year-old girl.]

> They go on emergencies like all police do. They eat lunch. [Five-year-old boy.]

In addition to asking whether the characters were make-believe or real, the researcher also asked the children whether they thought the actions taken by the characters in the television programs were make-believe or real. The specific question was: "Does he/she do make-believe or real things?" The responses to this question are reported in Table VIII.

As mentioned earlier, the patterns emerging in these responses are similar to those reported in Table VII, in answer to the question "Is he/she make-believe or is he/she real?" Where substantial differences are observed, they reflect the difference between the character and the actions performed by the character. For example, while only 10 percent of the children perceived of Wilma in _The Flintstones_ as real, 24 percent thought her actions were real. This difference is explained by the fact that Wilma is seen by the children as doing the things housewives do.

TABLE VIII

IDENTIFICATION BY CHILDREN
OF THE ACTIONS OF TV CHARACTERS
AS MAKE-BELIEVE OR REAL

Picture Shown	Response	Responses from Children Age 4 #	%	Age 5 #	%	Responses from Children Girls #	%	Boys #	%	Total Responses #	%*
(1) Big Bird, Sesame Street	MB	10	38	14	56	13	50	11	44	24	47
	R	12	46	7	28	11	42	8	32	19	37
	B	2	8	1	4	2	8	1	4	3	6
	DK**	2	8	4	16	1	4	5	20	6	12
(2) Steve Austin, The Six Million Dollar Man	MB	6	23	12	48	6	23	12	48	18	35
	R	8	31	6	24	6	23	8	32	14	27
	B	1	4	1	4	1	4	1	4	2	4
	DK	11	42	7	28	14	54	4	16	18	35
(3) Wilma, The Flintstones	MB	15	58	13	52	13	50	15	60	28	55
	R	6	23	6	24	8	31	4	16	12	24
	B	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	DK	5	19	5	20	4	15	6	24	10	20
(4) All Characters in the cast of Gilligan's Island	MB	5	19	9	36	9	35	5	20	14	27
	R	16	62	6	24	10	38	12	48	22	43
	B	0	0	1	4	0	0	1	4	1	2
	DK	7	27	4	16	7	27	4	16	9	27
(5) Mickey Mouse, and Donald Duck and Goofy, Wonderful World of Disney	MB	15	58	18	72	18	69	15	60	33	65
	R	6	23	1	4	3	12	4	16	7	14
	B	1	4	1	4	0	0	2	8	2	4
	DK	4	15	5	20	5	19	4	16	9	18
(6) Samantha and Endora, Bewitched	MB	8	31	14	56	11	42	11	44	22	43
	R	13	50	8	32	11	42	10	40	21	41
	B	0	0	1	4	0	0	1	4	1	2
	DK	7	27	4	16	7	27	4	16	11	22
(7) Popeye, Popeye	MB	12	46	17	68	16	62	13	52	29	57
	R	11	42	6	24	10	38	7	28	17	33
	B	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	DK	2	8	4	16	2	8	4	16	6	12
(8) Officers Reed and Malloy, Adam-12	MB	5	19	4	16	5	19	4	16	9	18
	R	18	69	15	60	18	69	15	60	33	65
	B	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	DK	3	12	7	28	4	8	6	24	10	20

* #=Number, %=Percent

** MB=Make-Believe, R=Real, B=Both Make-Believe & Real, DK=Didn't Know

As one five-year-old girl pointed out, "She does what my mother does -- goes to the grocery store, washes dishes, takes care of Pebbles [Wilma's baby]."

Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, and Goofy, the Walt Disney characters, were in a class by themselves. All of the fifty-one children interviewed with the second questionnaire were able to identify pictures of them (Table VI). Also, the Walt Disney characters were clearly understood as being make-believe on television. However, some children made a distinction between the cartoon characters on television and the costumed characters they had seen in person. For example, a five-year-old boy said, "They live in Florida. I think they're real in Florida." A four-year-old girl reported, "I went outside to see them at Disneyland. They do funny things." And another child, a five-year-old boy, stated, "They're real. I've seen them at Valley View [Shopping Center]."

Some children, in response to the question about the actions taken by characters in television programs, said that they were both make-believe and real. In Sesame Street, for example, a few children, explaining that Big Bird was a person dressed in a costume, went on to explain that what the person was doing was real, but what Big Bird was doing was make-believe. The number of such responses was sufficient that "both" was listed as a separate response in Table VIII.

Summary

The interviews conducted in connection with this study revealed considerable information about the viewing preferences, viewing habits, and the ability to distinguish fantasy from reality in selected television programs of four- and five-year-old middle-income white girls and boys.

The data showed that all the children watched television regularly and were able to name the programs they watched. The programs they preferred fell into four major categories: cartoons, action-adventure programs, situation comedies, and children's educational programs. Preferences for individual programs by girls and by boys suggested a certain amount of sex-role stereotyping or identification by the children.

The children interviewed perceived a great deal of parental supervision in their viewing of television, stating that parents told them when to turn the set on and off and reporting that both parents viewed television with them. Comments by the children suggested that, while parents exercise considerable control of viewing, this control may be limited to certain categories of programs. At the same time, the data suggested that children actively selected individual programs within the permitted categories.

An analysis of broadcast schedules showed that the children in the sample viewed television primarily during three time periods: Saturday mornings, late afternoon on weekdays, and mid-morning on weekdays.

When aided by showing pictures of the TV characters, the subjects were able to identify specific characters of television programs and to discuss them. For the most part, the children were able to understand the concepts of "make-believe" and "real," to distinguish between those concepts, and to apply them to specific television program characters and their actions. The most impressive finding with regard to fantasy and reality was the greater tendency of five-year-olds to identify television program characters as make-believe in comparison with four-year-olds. Thus, the evidence reflects the cognitive development of children changing from Piaget's "pre-operational stage" into the "concrete operations" stage. At the same time, the data showed no major difference between girls and boys in their ability to distinguish fantasy from reality.

While the information resulting from the interviews was clear, the fact must not be overlooked that a substantial number of responses indicated confusion on the part of the children. In some cases, the children did not seem to understand the intent of the question. Thus, some questions elicited responses which were unreliable for purposes of the study. Also, in those cases where the questions were generally understood, there was still a substantial number of "don't know" answers.

However, when placed in the context of the developmental stage of four- and five-year-old children, the responses which were given to the questions generally were surprisingly sophisticated. It seemed apparent that, for the most part, these children understood the television programs which were a part of their lives.

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CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The television viewing preferences, television viewing habits, and the ability to distinguish fantasy from reality in selected television programs of four- and five-year-old middle-income white girls and boys has been the problem of this study.

Interviews were conducted with sixty girls and boys, four and five years of age, randomly selected from three private preschools and day care centers.

A questionnaire was devised which provided information regarding television viewing habits of the sixty selected four- and five-year-old children. A second questionnaire was devised for a second interview with the children to determine if they were able to distinguish fantasy from reality in relation to the television programs they said they preferred. These children were interviewed both times by the researcher on a one-to-one basis.

The interviews conducted in connection with this study yielded information about the viewing preferences, viewing habits and the ability to distinguish fantasy from reality of four- and five-year-old middle-income white girls and boys.

The data showed that all the children watched television regularly and were able to name the programs they watched. The programs they preferred were in four major categories: cartoons, action-adventure programs, situation comedies, and children's educational programs.

An analysis of broadcast schedules showed that the children in the survey viewed television primarily during three time periods: Saturday mornings, late afternoon on weekdays, and mid-mornings on weekdays.

When aided by the showing of pictures of the television characters, the children were able to identify specific characters of television programs and to understand the concepts of "make-believe" and "real," to distinguish between those conepts, and to apply them to specific television program characters and their actions. The most impressive finding with regard to fantasy and reality was the greater tendency of five-year-olds to identify television program characters as make-believe in comparison with four-year-olds. The evidence reflects the cognitive development of children changing from

Piaget's "pre-operational stage" into the "concrete operations" stage. At the same time, the data showed no major difference between girls and boys in their ability to distinguish fantasy from reality.

Conclusions

The following conclusions have been drawn from this study. (1) Preferences for individual programs by girls and boys suggested a certain amount of sex role stereotyping or identification by the children. (2) Four- and five-year-old children actively select the television programs they watch rather than watching at random. (3) The children who were interviewed perceived a great deal of parental supervision in their viewing of television, stating that parents told them when to turn the set on and off, and reporting that both parents viewed television with them. Comments by the children suggested that, while parents exercise considerable control of viewing, this control may be limited to certain categories of programs. At the same time, the data suggested that children actively selected individual programs within the permitted categories. (4) The times of day when children watch television seem also to depend on parental supervision. (5) The data showed a significant developmental growth in fantasy-reality discrimination in the five-year-old children as compared with that of the four-year-old children. (6) The children interviewed found television pleasurable, a conclusion based on the researcher's observations and not on the children's specific remarks. The overall impression given was one of happy children with smiling faces when they identified the photographs of the characters from the preferred television programs. The emotional response was one of happy times connected with television, not violent or frightful times.

Recommendations

Three main recommendations are made for further study.

(1) The first recommendation deals with fantasy-reality. This study revealed that four-year-old and five-year-old girls and boys are capable of distinguishing fantasy from reality -- "make-believe" from "real" -- in relationship to television programs and the characters in these television programs. In some instances, not only were the four- and five-year-old girls and boys able to articulate the difference, but they did so on several

levels, such as distinguishing that the television characters are actors doing make-believe actions in make-believe situations.

Longitudinal research is needed concerning children beginning below the age of four and continuing to follow their television viewing for several years. Perhaps the research could identify when the fantasy-reality distinctions begin and how they develop. The research could determine the environmental causes, if any, that foster the ability to distinguish between fantasy-reality, and discover how the stages of development in young children relate to their ability to distinguish between fantasy and reality in relation to television.

(2) The second recommendation for further research pertains to sex role stereotyping. The pattern emerging from this study was that of sex role stereotyping in television programs named by both the girls and boys who were interviewed. Some other, earlier studies indicated that parents, as well as television programs, help establish sex role stereotyping in young children. Are there other factors? What are these factors? It seems that new investigations need to be made to determine why young children prefer such programs. Will the current thinking dealing with non-sexist education involve television and

young children? If so, what new patterns of television viewing will emerge? This topic could generate many new surveys.

(3) The final recommendation for research relates to parental supervision of a young child's television viewing. Does parental supervision happen as often as the children in this study perceived that it does? When does parental supervision occur and how does it occur? This study also indicated that young children selected certain types of television programs, such as cartoons, because their parents led them into viewing certain kinds of programs. Future research of parental supervision in relation to television could give more insight into this topic as well.

Hopefully, future researchers will consider that the young children of today live in a world in which television is a part of their total environment. Television has <u>always</u> been a constant companion of these children living in a mass media age. Future research, by attempting to discover what these children have gained from television and not merely what television has done to them, will perhaps produce information that will aid those concerned with the lives of young children.

> The ends of television for children must be the development of the child, at his own rate of speed, into an adult who can find his life satisfactions within this scheme of diversity and unity. It should

be the business of television for children to provide one of many bridges across which the child may pass from his fragmentary, fantasy world to the reality of adult life and social maturity (1, p.7).

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APPENDIX I

LETTER TO DIRECTOR OF PRESCHOOL AND CHILD CARE CENTER

September 27, 1976

(Name), Director
(Name of School) Preschool and
Child Care Center
(Address)
(City), (Zip Code)

Dear ,

I am currently involved in a research study for my Masters of Science in Early Childhood Education at North Texas State University.

The problem of my study will be the television viewing preferences, television viewing habits, and the ability to distinguish fantasy from reality in selected television programs of four- and five-year-old girls and boys.

I am writing to request permission for me to visit your school. The purpose of my visit will be to interview a random selection of four- and five-year-old children to determine their television viewing preferences. television viewing habits, and ability to distinguish fantasy from reality in selected television programs.

I would like to interview the same children twice, using two different questionnaires. The interviews would take place during the months of October, November, and December, 1976. I will arrange the exact dates and times with you and/or your teachers. I will be the only person interviewing the children.

I would appreciate a written reply by October 15, 1976. I will contact you upon receipt of your letter. Please call me if you have additional questions. Thank you very much for your interest and cooperation.

Sincerely yours,

Hilda Linn
13094 Meandering Way
Dallas, Texas 75240
Phone #233-3532

enclosure

Mrs. Hilda Linn
13094 Meandering Way
Dallas, Texas 75240

Dear Mrs. Linn,

This letter gives you permission to visit (name of school) Preschool and Day Care Center for the purpose of interviewing a random selection of four- and five-year-old children in connection with your thesis at North Texas State University.

I understand you will interview each child twice using two different questionnaires, and that the interviews will take place during the months of October, November, and December, 1976. To set up these interviews, please contact:

____

____

(signature) ______________________________

(date) ______________________________

APPENDIX II

QUESTIONNAIRE #1 -- Television Viewing Preferences and Television Viewing Habits

NAME OF CHILD: ________________________ DATE: ____________

Age: ______

School: ____

1. Do you watch television? Yes____ No____
2. Which programs do you watch?
3. Do you watch one program more than another?
4. Name the program you like best.
5. Tell me about ____________________________________
   (program named in question #3)
6. On which days do you watch television?
7. Do you watch television in the morning? Yes____ No____
8. Do you watch television before you go to school? Yes____ No____
9. Do you watch television after you get home from school? Yes____ No____
10. Do you watch television before you go to bed? Yes____ No____
11. Which programs are they?
12. Do you watch television on Saturday when there is no school? Yes____ No____
13. Which programs?
14. Do you watch television on Sunday when there is no school? Yes____ No____

Questionnaire #1 -- Page 2

Hilda Linn

15. Which programs?________________________________

16. Do you watch television on Saturday evening? Yes____ No____

17. Which programs?________________________________

18. Do you watch television on Sunday night? Yes____ No____

19. Which programs?________________________________

20. Does Mom or Dad tell you when you can turn on the television set?

21. Do you ever have to turn the television set off?

22. Does Mom watch television with you?

23. Does Dad watch television with you?

24. In which room is the TV set you watch?

25. Do you turn on the television set in any other room?

26. Do you have any brothers?

27. Do you have any sisters?

28. Do they watch television with you?

29. Who gets to choose the programs when they watch with you?

Questionnaire #1 -- Page 3

Hilda Linn

30. What else do you do when you watch television?

31. Do you play with any toys while you are watching television?

32. Do you watch TV with the light on or the light off?

33. Do you have a television set in your room where you sleep?

[* Tell me about it.]

Comments:

APPENDIX III

QUESTIONNAIRE #2 -- Fantasy/Reality

NAME OF CHILD:__________(age:____) SCHOOL:________________

Date:________________________

PHOTO #

Picture of

____

____

1. Who is this? (Who are they?)

2. Is he/she make-believe or is he/she real? (not real-pretend) (true)

3. a. What he/she does on television, could this really happen?

   yes________no_______both______

   b. (Does he/she do make-believe or real things?)

   c. Tell me about it.

Additional Comments:

APPENDIX IV -- Continued

Age 4 Total	Age 5 Total	Girls	Boys	Total
5	6	3	8	11
7	1	4	4	8
3	5	2	6	8
2	5	2	5	7
1	.	.	1	1
1	2	2	1	3
1	.	.	1	1
.	1	.	1	1
.	1	.	1	1
3	8	5	6	11
7	5	10	2	12
3	4	7	.	7
1	3	3	1	4
1	.	.	1	1
1	4	2	3	5
.	1	.	1	1
.	.	.	.	1
5	2	2	5	7
1	1	.	2	2
.	1	.	1	1
.	1	1	.	1
.	2	1	1	2
.	1	1	.	1

APPENDIX IV -- *Continued*

Television Program Category	Correct Television Program Title	Day and Time of Television Program
SITUATION COMEDY	*My Three Sons* *Bewitched* *Gilligan's Island* *Dick Van Dyke* *I Love Lucy* *Three (3) Stooges* *Hogan's Heroes*	M-F 8:00 p.m. M-F 6:00 p.m. M-F 4:30 p.m. M-F 5:30 p.m. M-F 5:00 p.m. M-F 7:00 a.m. M-F 5:30 p.m.
COMEDY VARIETY	*Johnny Carson* *Sonny & Cher* *Donny & Marie* *Carol Burnett* *Hee-Haw*	M-F 10:30 p.m. Sun 7:00 p.m. Fri 7:00 p.m. Sat 9:00 p.m. Sat 6:00 p.m.
ACTION-ADVENTURE	*Wonder Woman* *Adam-12* *Batman* *The Six Million Dollar Man* *Bionic Woman* *Gunsmoke*	Sat 7:00 p.m. M-F 6:30 p.m. not broadcast now Sun 7:00 p.m. Wed 7:00 p.m. M-F 7:00 p.m.
SPORTS	Football Olympics Baseball	Weekends, Monday night
SPECIALS	*Wizard of Oz* *Peter Pan* *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer* *Snoopy/Charlie Brown*	Early Evening

Sat=Saturday, Sun=Sunday, Mon=Monday, Wed=Wednesday
M-F=Monday through Friday

APPENDIX IV -- Continued

Age 4 Total	Age 5 Total	Girls	Boys	Total
.	2	.	2	2
3	5	3	5	8
4	5	2	7	9
2	2	1	3	4
3	4	2	5	7
2	1	.	3	3
1	.	.	1	1
.	1	1	.	1
.	1	1	.	1
1	.	1	.	1
.	1	1	.	2
.	1	1	.	1
4	4	2	4	8
3	5	3	5	8
2	2	1	3	4
1	6	2	5	7
1	3	1	4	5
1	3	1	3	4
5	1	2	4	6
1	.	.	1	1
1	1	.	2	2
1	1	2	.	2
2	1	3	.	3
3	1	3	1	4
1	1	.	2	2

APPENDIX IV -- <u>Continued</u>

Television Program Category	Correct Television Program Title*	Day and Time of Television Program
OTHERS	Night Time Movies Children's Theatre Big People Shows Giraffes Playmobile Dark Shadows Haunted House Rover Commercials Birdman Monsters When Jesus is on Tennessee Tuxedo Funny Shows Scary Shows Christmas Things Humphrey Bear Lorenzo & Henrietta Music Show Squad Cowboys/Westerns Army Question Shows News Shows	

*In this category correct title of TV program was unknown, thus the direct response of the children is listed.

APPENDIX IV -- Continued

Age 4 Total	Age 5 Total	Girls	Boys	Total
1	.	.	.	1
1	2	2	2	4
1	.	1	.	1
1	.	1	.	1
1	.	1	.	1
1	.	1	.	1
1	.	.	1	1
1	.	.	1	1
1	.	.	1	1
1	.	.	1	1
1	.	.	1	1
1	.	.	1	1
.	1	1	.	1
.	1	1	.	1
.	1	1	.	1
.	1	1	.	1
.	1	1	.	1
.	1	1	.	1
.	1	.	1	1
.	1	.	1	1
.	1	.	1	1
.	1	.	1	1
.	1	.	1	1
4	.	2	2	4

APPENDIX V

TELEVISION PROGRAM NAMED AS FAVORITE BY CHILDREN

CATEGORY/PROGRAM	Children Naming Program		
	Age 4	Age 5	Total
CARTOON			
"Cartoons"	2	3	5
Popeye	2	.	2
Bugs Bunny/Roadrunner	1	1	2
Felix the Cat	.	2	2
Super Friends	.	1	1
Total for Category	5	7	12
ACTION-ADVENTURE			
Wonder-Woman	1	2	3
Adam-12	1	2	3
Batman	2	.	2
Six Million Dollar Man	.	3	3
Bionic Woman	.	1	1
Total for Category	4	8	12
SITUATION COMEDY			
Bewitched	.	1	1
Gilligan's Island	.	1	1
Slam Bang Theatre	1	.	1
Total for Category	1	2	3
CHILDREN'S EDUCATIONAL			
Sesame Street	4	3	7
Misterogers Neighborhood	.	1	1
Zoom	.	1	1
Dusty's Treehouse	.	1	1
Total for Category	4	6	10

APPENDIX V -- Continued

CATEGORY/PROGRAM	Children Naming Program Age 4	Age 5	Total
CHILDREN'S NON-CARTOON			
Wonderful World of Disney	3	.	3
Kroft Supershow	1	1	2
Animals, Animals, Animals		1	1
Little Rascals	1	.	1
Total for Category	5	2	7
SPECIALS			
Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer	1	1	2
Total for Category	1	1	2
SPORTS			
Sports	1	.	1
Soccer	1	.	1
Total for Category	2	0	2
OTHERS (UNIDENTIFIABLE)	2	2	4
Total for Category	2	2	4
NO FAVORITE	6	2	8
Total for Category	6	2	8
TOTALS	30	30	60

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