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The Million-Dollar Question: Why Pre-Adolescents Watch Television

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THE MILLION-DOLLAR QUESTION: WHY PRE-ADOLESCENTS

WATCH TELEVISION

by

Emily Anne Smurthwaite

A thesis submitted to the faculty of

Brigham Young University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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GRADUATE COMMITTEE APPROVAL

of a thesis submitted by

Emily Anne Smurthwaite

This thesis has been read by each member of the following graduate committee and by

majority vote has been found satisfactory.

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BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

As chair of the candidate's graduate committee, I have read the thesis of Emily Anne Smurthwaite in its final form and have found that (1) its format, citations, and bibliographic style are consistent and acceptable and fulfill the university and department style requirements; (2) its illustrative materials including figures, tables, and charts are in place; and (3) the final manuscript is satisfactory to the graduate committee and is ready for submission to the university library.

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ABSTRACT

THE MILLION-DOLLAR QUESTION: WHY PRE-ADOLESCENTS

WATCH TELEVISION

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Master of Arts

This study presents qualitative research examining the relationship youth have with television. Information for this study was collected through media journals, personal essays, in-depth interviews, and focus groups held with eighteen sixth-graders who attended a charter elementary school in Lindon, Utah.

The question posed to the students multiple times during the data collection was: "Would you give up television for $1 million?" Through the students' answers and ensuing dialogue, the researcher examined the social value the pre-adolescents attributed to watching television. The findings identify three main categories the students said were reasons they were attached to television, which also corresponded adolescent-needs that have been identified by scholars. The categories are 1) youth need friendship and television offers potential to develop parasocial relationships 2) youth need intimacy and television is an activity they can do with and talk about with friends and 3) youth need to

learn about the new group they're being socialized into and television offers portrayals of future situations.

The study also includes ideas about why television is so valuable to the youth; it concludes with suggestions for future research, including expanding this research to other demographics, and recommendations for parents and school teachers, including media literacy and parental mediation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In 1995, PBS's *Frontline* ran a special called "Does TV Kill?" that focused on children and television. Part of the investigation included installing small video cameras in homes to monitor families' television use in Hudson, New York. That town was chosen because the first connection between television and violence was from research collected there (McLeod, 1995). Part of the *Frontline* report focused on the families who had the cameras installed in their homes. The other part of the report included interviews with those children, now adults, who had been part of the initial study and now had children of their own.

A candid moment was caught as the camera crews were leaving. A boy named Ryan, who's father, Paul, had been part of that initial media effects study when Paul was in third grade, was asked, "Suppose someone offered you a million dollars saying you can never watch the television screen again." Ryan quickly replied, "I wouldn't do it." To which the reporter said, "Not even for a million dollars?" Ryan responded, "Not even a million dollars. What would you do?" (McLeod, 1995).

That brief question and answer from the *Frontline* report inspired and drove this research to find the motivating factors in pre-adolescents' media use. In this study, a similar question was posed to nineteen sixth-grade students attending a charter school in Lindon, Utah. This study expanded beyond the initial million-dollar question and looked at why television is valuable (or not valuable) to them and why the students watched (or did not watch) it. Through research—including media journals, personal essays, in-depth interviews, and focus groups—data was gathered that describes these pre-adolescents feelings about television. The students were asked three times, in three different settings if they would give up television for $1 million.

Though this study analyzes a specific medium and relies on mass communication theory, it also draws from socialization theories. Children, ages nine to thirteen, are in transition. This is a time when they are going through socialization processes and have different social needs that sometimes can be fulfilled through watching television (Arnett, 1995a; Arnett, 1995b). Typically this age group is heavily involved with the media (MacBeth, 1996). The personality development they are going through may be a factor in their attachment to television (Erikson, 1968). Social factors can influence the pre-adolescents' television use—either by using television content as common ground for conversation or through social learning from television characters (Bandura 1977; Bandura 1986). The uses and gratifications theory (Katz et al., 1986) and social learning theory (Bandura 1977; Bandura 1986) will be explained and connected with in relation to children's television use in further chapters.

This study looks at the social needs aspect of media effects research through examining the needs youth have and collecting qualitative data to understand why youth

turn to television. Do most believe watching television is worth $1 million? For this study, the researcher analyzed short essays, media use journals, and in-depth interviews and focus group transcripts to answer the following research questions:

R1: What are the motivating factors behind children's television use?

R2: Why might children consider their television access to be worth more than $1 million?

This study looks at how television affects children socially, an aspect regularly missing in media effects research. Media effects studies often look at television's negative aspects, rather than its social effects (Strasburger & Donnerstein, 1999). This study also is focused on identifying why youth watch television and why it could be considered so valuable to them.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

This thesis used qualitative methods to look at sixth graders' television use. The research was based on a question posed to the youth: "Would you give up television for one million dollars?" The research looks at the uses the children have for watching television in relation to their developmental needs. In order to better understand the relationship between youth and television, this chapter will examine academic literature.

There are different beliefs about why people watch television. This chapter will specifically look at uses and gratification theory (Katz et al., 1986) and research on the social cognitive theory (Bandura 1977; Bandura 1986), which will explain how youth use television to fulfill their social and developmental needs (Erikson, 1968). Pre-adolescents who are nine to thirteen years old are going through socialization processes and have certain needs—needs that might be fulfilled through watching television. A recently coined term, "tweens," has been used to describe this age group (Chunovic, 2002). Television has the potential to play a strong influential role in the socialization of these tweens (Arnett, 1995a; Arnett, 1995b; Arnett et al, 1995). Television is a big part of their lives—about two thirds of all children ages 8-16 in the United States are estimated to have a television in their bedroom (Chunovic, 2002).

Uses and Gratifications

Initial media effects studies in the early twentieth century assumed a passive audience—this view has been referred to as the magic bullet model or the hypodermic

needle model (Klapper 1960; Rubin, 1994). This mindset was a public concern, and a private foundation known as The Payne Fund decided to study the effects of movies on children. Its findings enforced the idea that the media were powerful and influential (Rubin, 1994). In the mid-1900s, the perspective shifted to a more "limited effects" view—perpetuating the idea that the media isn't all-powerful and influential (Sparks 2002). In the 1940s, studies focused on audience gratification and interpretation such as Lazarfeld and Stanton's radio studies, Herzog's quiz program and soap opera research, and Suchman's look at radio use (Katz et al., 1973; Ruggiero, 2000; Rubin, 1994; Sparks 2002). Studies into what is now known as the uses and gratifications theory followed the limited effects paradigm (Klapper, 1960; Sparks, 2002). In the 1970s, Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1973) formalized the theory in their article, "Uses and Gratifications Research." During the next decade, the theory was scrutinized, tested, and recognized as a major communication paradigm (Rosengren, 1974; McLeod & Becker, 1974; Katz et al., 1973).

Uses and gratifications research analyzes audience motivation and consumption (Rubin, 1994). Researchers have expanded beyond the initial questions of "Who uses the media and what are the effects?" to questions of "What do people do with the media?" In early research, the links between the gratifications detected and the psychological or sociological origins of needs that are satisfied weren't investigated (Ruggiero, 2000). This theory expanded to take into consideration society's perceptions and motivations, along with individual audience characteristics, needs, and behavioral influences (Rosengren, 1974).

There are some basic assumptions that Katz et al. (1973) laid out in their seminal article, which build upon each other. First, researchers assume the audience is active. Researchers can look at media effects along a continuum. At the two extremes are the beliefs that viewers are either active or passive. The view a person has influences his/her beliefs of how media effects influence individuals. Before this theory was introduced, mass communication research assumed a passive audience—the hypodermic needle persuasion model assumed media content directly equaled media effect (McLeod & Becker, 1974). This simple idea was never formally expressed, but it was the general, prevalent view (Sparks, 2002). Then the limited effects perspective was introduced, which minimized the effects of the media (Klapper, 1960). This paradigm was influenced by a study led by Paul Lazarsfeld, which analyzed the effects of media exposure and influence on presidential election voting (Sparks, 2002). These early models paved the way for uses and gratifications theory by trying to identify a medium's influence. The uses and gratifications theory envisions the audience as actively selective—it attempts to explain how individuals use the media to satisfy their needs and achieve their goals instead of the media having ultimate power over the viewer (Katz et al., 1974).

The second assumption made by Katz et al. (1973) is that the audience member will actively pursue media that satisfies his/her needs. It emphasizes the idea that media use is goal driven. When a person's needs are satisfied, the need is said to be gratified. Psychological dispositions, sociological factors, and environmental conditions all can influence what needs people will seek to gratify (Katz et al., 1974). When looking at a situation through the uses and gratifications lens, the audience is assumed to be somewhat active—although not all audience members are equally active. This, to a large extent,

depends on the viewers' social context (Rubin, 1994). McGuire (1974) explained, "The large proportion of their time that people choose to devote to media consumption is evidence that however illusory the gratification offered, it may exceed the more tangible but inaccessible or unsatisfying satisfactions available in their actual world" (p. 169). Even though needs might be met only vicariously, for some it's a better option than real-world gratifications.

People have social and psychological needs, and the third assumption is that television or any medium can satisfy needs and competes with other sources of need satisfaction (Katz et al., 1974). Those who analyze situations through the uses and gratifications perspective believe that people recognize they are watching television to get that connection. Windahl et al. (1986) explained, "People are differently attached to the media, and their attachment may be influencing both their media use and their gratifications from that use" (p. 59). McQuail and Gurevitch similarly (1974) explained:

Media consumption by the individual is seen as behavior that meets (or fails to meet) needs generated through an interaction of the individual's psychological dispositions and experience of this social situation. Clearly, however, mass media use is not necessarily seen as related to all, or even most, human needs, but rather to certain well-defined albeit it varied, areas of need for which mass communication might be especially suited. (p. 288)

Within this assumption is the idea that the media can be used as a substitute—or functional alternative—for other activities (Windahl et al., 1986). This goes along with the idea that "needs and interest normally may be satisfied in more than one way, and different habits, practices, and acts can fulfill the same functions for the same

individuals" (Windahl et al., 1986, p. 48). Instead of playing a game with friends to relieve stress, a person may turn to a televised sports event to unwind.

The fourth assumption looks at the methodological data supplied by the audience. This theory believes that people are sufficiently self-aware of their media uses and gratifications that they clearly can share them with the researcher (Katz et al., 1973). Uses and gratifications studies almost always rely on self-reports, which some may see as a weakness (see Theory Limitations section); however, others argue that uses and gratifications research surfaces people's recognizable thoughts, but those impressions are usually left as thoughts and not verbalized.

The fifth assumption is that judgments about the cultural meanings of the media should be set aside while audience preferences are uncovered during data collection (Katz et al., 1973). In uses and gratifications research, the data collector needs to approach the research theoretically (Katz et al., 1973). By withholding biases, the researcher allows the participants to openly share their experiences with the mass media and gives room for new theories to emerge.

Uses and gratifications theorists believe that viewers turn to the media for different reasons—often they will turn to it to reinforce their beliefs. Rubin (1994) explained, "People intentionally participate and select media or messages from communication alternatives in response to their expectations. These expectations emanate from personal traits, social content, and interactions" (p. 421). This is the "uses" part of the theory. Rubin (1994) continues, "A person has the capacity for subjective choice and interpretation and initiates behavior such as media selection. This initiative affects outcomes"—the gratifications part (p. 421).

Uses and gratifications among youth

The Kaiser Family Foundation recently tracked more than three thousand children and studied their media use. The researchers found that among children eight to eighteen years, 65 percent of them have a television in their bedroom and 61 percent reported that their parents don't have rules about watching television (Weitz, 1999). The report also found that on average, children eight and older watch two hours and forty-six minutes each day and nineteen hours and nineteen minutes each week (Weitz, 1999).

In a replication of a study by Greenburg, Rubin (1979) surveyed children about reasons they watch television. In his study, 124 fourth graders, 146 eighth graders, and 131 eleventh graders in Illinois completed questionnaires about their viewing motivations (Rubin, 1979). The respondents' answers fell into six main categories: the children watched television for learning, to pass time/out of habit, for companionship, to forget/escape, for arousal, and for relaxation (Rubin, 1979). Rubin (1979) concluded that children and adolescents were able to verbalize their reasons for watching television—that awareness is a crucial assumption of the functional perspective and uses and gratifications paradigm. Children who watched for arousal gratifications preferred dramatic programs, while habitual, escapist, and companionship viewers preferred comedies (Rubin, 1979). Rubin (1979) also discovered that the children who more strongly identified with each of the reasons for using television watched greater amounts of it, had an increased affinity for it, and believed its content to be a more accurate reflection of life than others.

Among older children, the reasons can slightly change, and Arnett (1995a) reported a difficulty in categorizing adolescent media use because of their diversity and

the diversity of the media. However, his research indicated the most common adolescent media uses are for: entertainment, identity formation, high sensation, coping, and youth culture identification (Arnett, 1995). Some have suggested that adolescent television viewing drops a bit because watching television in most homes is a family event and adolescents tend to want to pull away from that (Lull, 1985). However, as youth enter their teenage years, they have established personal routines, including media-related activities, independent from their parents (Lull, 1985).

McGuire (1979) explained that since the media showcase people who are acting out familiar and stylized roles, identification theories have considerable significance to the gratifications obtained from media consumption. He continued:

> Even where the content is not explicitly designed to present characters in attractive roles … the media tend to portray people in a myriad of dramatic situations involving interesting responses that acquaint the audience with a variety of roles and life-styles, thus supplying material for possible role identities to add to one's own self-concept. (p. 189)

A youth can seek out popular television shows because that is what his friends will be talking about at school the next day. When people see value in social networks and connections with others, this is known as social capital (Putnam, 2000). Having common discussion topics and interests is sociological superglue as it bonds people together (Putnam, 2000). The media can provide a common ground for youth, and involvement with the media may help youth feel that they are involved with a larger peer network (Arnett, 1995). Arnett (1995) explains:

Talking about a topic raises its salience to the conversants … Thus, talking may

be said to increase awareness of the topic and to attach a social value to

information concerning it. The more topic-related messages one perceives in the

media, and the more knowledge one holds, the more social rewards are available

in conversation. (p. 117)

Thus, a youth watching a show he/she knows his/her friends are watching on a school

night could be considered "social homework" for the next school day. Gunter and

McAleer (1997) wrote:

Both children and adolescents cite television as a major source of conversational

material. Programmes provide a fertile ground of common experience for the next

morning's conversations in the classroom. Unless you have watched the most

popular programmes of the day, you are likely to be left out. (p. 23)

Katz et al. (1973), wrote, "The social and environmental circumstances that lead

people to turn to the mass media for the satisfaction of certain needs are also little

understood as yet" (p. 516). Over the last few decades a clearer picture of the social

derivatives of media use has come forward. The paradox of this situation is that youth can

turn to the television to become more individualistic and to break away from their

parents, but at the same time they are also using the television to find others who like the

same things they like (Arnett, 1995). So while their uses can be considered fairly

distinctive, they also can be somewhat conformist in nature.

Though some look at television as a "moral miseducator of children," this section

has shown how youth use television (McArthur, 2002). This age group has quite a bit of

spending power and financially supports their favorite television shows. The age group

called "tweens"—children from the third grade through those in middle school—have an estimated annual buying power of up to $260 billion (Chunovic, 2002). Marketers realize that television is a way youth learn about themselves and peers; it's a way to get information to understand what is acceptable to other tweens (Chunovic, 2002; Weitz, 1999).

Theory Limitations

A major limitation with the uses and gratifications theory is that researchers haven't reached a consensus on exactly how active (or passive) television viewers are or how to factor that in research. Rubin (1994) explained, "Activity, itself, has been treated as a variable rather than as a description or prescription of the audience" (424).

Another problem with uses and gratifications research is that effects are difficult to measure. It has been criticized because of a lack of clarity and definition of ideas such as needs, motives, behavior and consequences; similarly researchers can also attach different meanings to concepts such as motives, uses, and gratifications (Rubin, 1994). Thoughts may be too abstract to obtain valid answers about gratifications truly obtained from respondents (Rosengren, 1974). It's also hard to measure the factors that influence data (Kline et al., 1974). Lin (1996) explained, "Albeit penitential in light of its lack of grounding in socio-psychological and cultural antecedent factors, the theory's validity is further imperiled by the lack of empirical distinction between needs versus motivations as well as the difficulties involved in measuring 'gratification' of needs" (p. 575). The uses and gratifications research paradigm has been criticized for being too individualistic—that it's hard to apply findings from one study to on a broad scale (Rubin, 1994; Ruggiero, 2000).

Uses and gratifications research often relies on self-reported data, which has inherent accuracy problems (Ruggiero, 2000). By relying too heavily on other people's media reports, researchers have the chance of missing unconscious effects (Sparks, 2002). Self-reports also are problematic because of forgetfulness or because a respondent may feel pressure to answer in a socially desirable way—to make themselves look good (Sparks, 2002).

Socialization and Development Needs

Socialization is an interactive process where an individual acquires the norms, values, beliefs, attitudes, and language characteristics of a group or culture (Gecas, 1992). The three main goals of this process are: 1) impulse control or the development of conscience, 2) role preparation and performance, and 3) cultivating sources of meaning and value (Arnett, 1995b). The assumption is that junior members (adolescents), in order to adopt the group's culture, learn and model behavior from the senior members (or adults) in the group (Tan et al., 1997). During socialization, adolescents acquire the behaviors and beliefs of the social world and culture they live in (Arnett, 1995a).

Scholars have written about the various needs of children and adolescents. From ages six to eleven, children are challenged with learning how to keep themselves busy in this period and forming self-conceptions (Miller & Shelly, 2000; Damon, 1983). Self-concepts form as they composite a view of themselves through their experiences and evaluations in situations with others—this is also known as self-appraisal (Bandura, 1986). They also desire to learn social skills because they want to fit in at school and form friendships (McCay & Keyes, 2002).

The main steps of the adolescent socialization process have been analyzed and compartmentalized; there are various needs that can be fulfilled through television. Erikson (1968) identified different stages youth go through as they develop their personality: trust/mistrust, autonomy/shame, doubt, initiative/cult, and industry/inferiority. Youth seek intimacy as they are going through these stages. Erikson (1977) wrote that through identification comes an intimacy stage, which is

> a sustained mutuality in affiliations of work, friendship, and love. … Its ritualistic side is a kind of shared narcissism in the form of an elitism of exclusive groups. It must be obvious that exactly that demonstrative display of shared tastes and predilections, of enthusiastic opinions and scathing judgments that so often pervade the conversations and actions of young adults bound in love or work, in friendship or in ideology completes the human form of those instinctive bonds… . (p. 110)

Youth, twelve to eighteen-years-old, are interested in making long-term friendships and being involved with friendship groups, but sometimes that doesn't happen. Parasocial relationships occur when viewers believe they have a relationship with a television character or personality (Perse & Rubin, 1989). Children who feel like they are lacking friends or who strongly identify with a television character may develop a parasocial relationship (Gunter & McAleer, 1997). That character can offer stability, familiarity, and self-disclosure to the viewer—all very important characteristics of a friend at a time when making friends is an especially high priority. Identification with selected characters, even if it is not as extreme as a parasocial relationship, is one

outcome of television viewing that is believed to mediate the socialization process (Hoffner, 1996).

Youth also think about what career they want to pursue as part of the socialization process. When children are in elementary school they attach themselves to adults—teachers or their friends' parents—and they are curious about those people's occupations; the children want to watch and imitate the people who are in a variety of occupations (Erikson, 1968).

As the come upon the adolescent years, youth struggle with identity as they compare themselves to others, and they struggle with intimacy (Erikson, 1968). At this stage, a sense of inferiority comes in, which could also bring about a sense of unworthiness or self-consciousness (Erikson, 1968). Also at this time the youth are concerned about how they appear to others. Erikson (1968) explains:

They are sometimes morbidly, often curiously, preoccupied with what they appear to be in the eyes of others as compared with what they feel they are, and with the question of how to connect the roles and skills cultivated earlier with the ideal prototypes of the day. (p. 128)

Erikson (1968) believes these feelings adolescents experience cause them to look for ideas they can trust and role models who can teach them. As a defense against this identity loss, Erikson (1968) explains that the youth form groups or cliques who exclude others who are different from themselves, which give them some source of stability: a group of loyal peers. Developing an identity can be a difficult process; however, "self-identity emerges from experiences in which temporarily confused selves are successfully reintegrated in an ensemble of roles which also secure social recognition" (Erikson, 1968,

p. 211). In the adolescent stage, socialization issues may make them more inclined to turn to television than when they are going through childhood or adult socialization (Arnett, 1995a). Arnett (1995a) explains:

> Adolescence is a time when important aspects of socialization are taking place, especially with regard to identity-related issues such as occupational preparation, gender role learning, and the development of a set of values and beliefs. (p. 520)

Identity formation is one of the most important developmental challenges of adolescences along with the cultivation of a conception of values, abilities, and hopes (Arnett, 1995a).

Socialization and television

Television is a dominant part of modern life; one study indicated that children spend more time watching television than doing anything else—even more than sleeping (MacBeth, 1996). Youth in North America eventually spend more time watching television than they do in school (MacBeth, 1996). Television plays a significant role in the socialization of American children and scholars have tried to determine the influence television messages have on a person's construction of reality (Hoffner, 1996; Potter & Chang, 1990). However, consideration of developmental factors is rare in many media studies (Arnett et al., 1995). Though children may believe they are just watching the television for fun, there may be serious message interpretation and social motivations.

There are seven principal sources of socialization: family, peers, school, community, the media, the legal system, and the cultural belief system (Arnett, 1995a). Arnett (1995a) explained that as a socialization influence, the media tend to be a broad socializing agent, meaning that they promote a broad range of possible role models and

different values, beliefs, interests, and personality characteristics. A broad socializing culture encourages individualism, independence, and self-expression, whereas a narrow socializing culture emphasizes obedience and conformity (Arnett, 1995b) The media tend to be classified as a broad socializing agent because of the variety of role models, values, and interests that are represented (Arnett, 1995a; Arnett, 1995b). Because television is a broad socializing agent, it is often used in the company of others—especially friends. It is a way to ease social interaction. McQuail (2000) explained the seemingly universal appeal television has:

Attending to the media is often accompanied by talk about the ongoing experience. The content of the media (news items, stories, performances) provides an object of shared attention for many as well as topics of conversation. Media-related talk is especially useful in providing a non-intrusive basis of contact with strangers. (p. 400)

Children initially learn what to watch and the amount to watch from their family members (MacBeth, 1996). Families are the main socializing force influencing children's television use and what they learn from it (MacBeth, 1996). The children's environments affect what they use television for and how much they watch—sociocultural factors and parental mediation are also influential. Some scholars claim that television is the third most influential source, behind family and the social environment in which a person resides (MacBeth, 1996).

Arnett (1995a) wrote about the socialization-television connection:

As a source of adolescent socialization, media bear the most similarity to peers. In both cases, adolescents have substantial control over their own socialization, as

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they make choices about media and peers more or less independently of the

preferences of their parents or other adult socializers. (p. 527)

The irony of this situation is that as adolescents try to break away from adults and

become independent individuals, they often look for peers who are similar to themselves

(Arnett, 1995a).

Tan et al. (1997) explained four ways how television could influence an

adolescent's socialization. The first is learning about socialization through observation on

television. Learning is the first step in the socialization process, and adolescents are able

to observe the requirements for socialization through television (Tan et al., 1997).

Second, youth evaluate the observed event—it's realism and functionality and the

perceived rewards (Tan et al., 1997). If the event is perceived as real and the rewards

observed are desirable then it will seem functional for the observer (Tan et al., 1997).

Third, the adolescent internalizes the functional evaluation of the observed event into the

observers' own reality (Tan et al., 1997). Lastly, the youth will assimilate the

socialization requirements if they are perceived to be functional/rewardable (Tan et al.,

1997). Through this process, adolescents can get in the habit of turning to television for

socialization.

Children and adolescents desire to learn social skills because they want to fit in at

school and form friendships (McCay & Keyes, 2002). Connecting with others is a crucial

component that can easily come through discussing the latest episode of *Spongebob*

Squarepants or *American Idol*. It is easy to talk about media content with strangers and

with friends—it is a common tie that millions of people have and can aid the

communication/relationship process. Television can also give them objects for social

comparison (which then can aid or hinder the formation of self-conception); it can teach them what's socially acceptable and what's not; and it can give them something to talk about with other peers, thus aiding the intimacy process. Interpersonal needs of youth result in various media uses, which produce different outcomes, depending on the user and need sought (Rubin, 1994).

Social Cognitive Theory

One part of the socialization process is learning about the group youth are being socialized into (Arnett, 1995a). As youth begin the socialization process, they desire to learn about people and cultures. Bandura (1977; Bandura 1986) explained that virtually all learning resulted from direct or vicarious experience. Bandura wrote, "The more costly and hazardous the possible mistakes, the heavier is the reliance on observational learning from competent examples" (1977, p. 12). In learning, either through experience or observations, people develop a conscious of which responses are appropriate in different settings (Bandura, 1977; Bandura 1986). Those outcomes can be motivations for people to either engage or avoid certain behaviors—they also are incredibly efficient. Bandura (1977) explains:

> Learning would be exceedingly laborious, not to mention hazardous, if people had to rely solely on the effects of their own actions to inform them what to do. Fortunately, most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling: from observing others one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action. Because people can learn from example … they are spared needless error. (p. 22)

The people who are used as models—those who are perceived to be positively rewarded for the things they do—are often sought (Bandura, 1977). "The functional value of the behavior displayed by different models is therefore highly influential in determining which models people will observe and which they will disregard" (Bandura, 1977, p. 24). Modeled behaviors are easy to remember because of the ease of remembering something visually communicated; when someone has developed the capacity to learn observationally, they cannot be kept from learning what they see (Bandura, 1977; 1986).

Research has shown that adults and children acquire attitudes, emotional responses, and new styles of conduct through television (Bandura, 1977). Some have suggested it takes teaching responsibilities away from parents. Banduara (1977) wrote:

In view of the efficacy of, and extensive public exposure to, televised modeling, the mass media play an influential role in shaping behavior and social attitudes. … With increasing use of symbolic modeling, parents, teachers, and other traditional role models may occupy less prominent roles in social learning. (p. 39)

In addition to television's ability to give students social rewards, television can also offer information to a curious viewer. Gunter and McAleer (1997) expanded on the advantages of learning from television:

In learning about life, television programmes may be selected because they contain information about people, places and the way society operates. They may offer insights into the way people in distant places feel and behave. The child may learn about different social and racial groups, different occupations, lifestyles and events that are happening in the outside world. (p. 20)

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Youth can turn to television for information on how to cope with social needs that they're missing from their own environment (Gunter & McAleer, 1997). Television shows other youth dealing with all sorts of situations. It gives youth situations to learn from and model (Bandura, 1977). Even if a program is not intended to overtly teach something, children can still learn from them (MacBeth, 1996).

Bandura (1994; Bandura 1986) wrote about vicarious capability that television possesses. "Much social learning occurs either deliberately or inadvertently by observing the actual behavior of others and the consequences for them" (Bandura, 1994, p. 66). Relationships, values, thinking patterns, humor, acceptable behavior, popularity, traumatic situations, and violence can all be portrayed through television and vicariously learned through watchers. Television shows can take viewers on a voyeuristic journey into people's homes, challenges, relationships, and fears. By looking at other people's lives, viewers can feel better about their own circumstance and learn from the mistakes of those on television.

Children believe that television, especially through its dramatic character representations and situations, can offer information applicable to them—it can show them how to interact with other peers and people (Gunter & McAleer, 1997). Because people are self-reflective and can distinguish between accurate and faulty thinking, children can identify how to appropriately act. In Bandura's (1994) words: "In verifying thought by self-reflective means, people monitor their ideas, act on them or predict occurrences from them, then they judge from the results the adequacy of their thoughts and change them accordingly" (p. 64).

Television portrays situations that usually involve some conflict or uncertainty. Through watching these stories unfold, a child will learn what to do if that situation arises in his/her life. Bandura (1994) wrote, "People gain understanding of causal relationships and expand their knowledge by symbolically manipulating the information derived from personal and vicarious experiences" (p. 63).

This vicarious learning is particularly useful for children. Damon (1983) wrote that as children change from preadolescents to adolescents, they learn through trial-and-error situations. Those youth who have older brothers or sisters have an advantage because they have an immediate role model who they have already observed going through similar situations (Damon, 1983). But not all children are able to learn from other siblings, so television becomes the next best thing—there are numerous sitcom "sisters" or "brothers" available. Children who have older siblings can also turn to television as an additional learning source.

Other researchers have previously looked at why people watch television and made connections to the social sciences. The reasons why people watch television include: for companionship, to have something to facilitate conversation, for affiliation or avoidance, social learning, or role reinforcement (Lull, 1980). Children refer to televisions shows to clarify what they are saying. Lull (1980) said: "Television examples are used by children to explain to each other, and to their parents and teachers, those real-world experiences, emotions, and beliefs which are difficult to make interpersonally transparent in attempts at verbal communication" (p. 202). Social learning can come through watching television—either the viewer can be taught about suggestions for social

interaction or game shows, public television, or network specials can serve as substitute

school experiences (Lull, 1980).

Synthesis

Clearly there is pressure on pre-adolescents to fit in and form relationships. The

pre-adolescent and adolescent years are times when children are trying to learn how to act

in certain situations they are stumbling upon as they experience the socialization process.

The pre-adolescents are experiencing social needs, and one of the primary purposes of

media use at this age is fulfillment of those needs. Theories that emphasize content, like

uses and gratifications theory, will predict that adolescents will choose televisions shows

that have content relevant to their interests and needs because they will glean information

from it that will be helpful in their lives (Anderson et al., 2001). Lull (1985) explained:

> The interpersonal relations and media usages of adolescents reflect the dynamics
>
> of their struggle—a search for self-identity and meaning in an increasingly
>
> impersonal world and an irrepressible energy that demands change from a
>
> resistant environment. (p. 209)

Some research has scrutinized the relationship between social identity and

television viewing gratification, using the uses and gratifications framework. It has been

suggested that people can turn to mediums, like the television, to gain a stronger

identification with a social group—in turn, this would construct an affirmative

consequence: a social identity gratification (Harwood, 1999). These gratifications are a

motivation that result in people selecting the media they believe will help them achieve

this social identity. Harwood (1999) believes there is a link between a person's identity

concerns and television viewing—if the identity gratifications sought are positively met,

then a viewer will continue to seek and use television in a cyclical fashion. Harwood (1999) also theorizes the possibility that there may be groups of viewers who seek identity gratifications along with other gratifications such as entertainment or learning.

There are a handful of reasons why children watch television, Rubin (1979) found that learning is one reason. Children need to learn how to behave in different social situations as they begin the socialization process (Gunter & McAleer, 1997).

Social learning theory states people learn from observance of others (Miller & Shelly, 2000; Bandura 1977) and focuses on the idea of model behaviors. By observing characters (potential role models) and situations on television, children can learn how to act socially—making television a major socializing agent, and consequently it becomes very influential. Because television is so prevalent, children can turn to it to find an idol—with the numerous shows and characters available, they are bound to find someone they can relate to (Gunter & McAleer, 1997). Bandura (1977) explained that televised modeling is so intrinsically rewarding that it can hold people's attention for long periods of time. He (1977) continued:

> The advent of television has greatly expanded the range of models available to children and adults alike. … people today can observe and learn diverse styles of conduct within the comfort of their homes through the abundant symbolic modeling provided by the mass media. (pp. 24–25)

There are no simple answers when it comes to media effects questions—especially in relation to children and adolescents. Familial influences, parental mediation, class, race, gender, self-image—they all can influence the way a child views and interprets a television program. Much of the research and theory covering the topic of

adolescents and the media is missing a model of active involvement and development (Arnett et al., 1995; Ruggiero, 2000). This research seeks to understand how pre-adolescents interpret television's messages from a social perspective.

Early studies, such as Bandura's (1977; Bandura 1986) work on social learning theory, showed that watching television can influence children to be more violent. But media effects studies need to expand beyond the violence factor and look in-depth at other effects of television watching. There is a need to look at television's role in comparison with the social desires of youth. Social needs can sometimes be lost in the effects research. Studies often look at the effects of the media in a narrow, negative light—probably because it contributes to more adverse outcomes, rather than positive or prosocial ones (Strasburger & Donnerstein, 1999). Research involving the collaboration between media effects and adolescent development is still in early stages; until the last decade, communications and journalism scholars conducted almost all the research on adolescents' media use (Arnett et al., 1995). The literature in this chapter shows that youth have certain needs as they grow older, and that television offers youth situations and experiences that can help fulfill those needs. The research takes this idea and examines it in depth with a group of sixth grade students in central Utah.

Recent studies

Studies focusing on motivations and reasons for children's media use have largely focused on two areas: parental mediation and effects from violent portrayals. Verma and Larson (2002) researched television use culturally, by examining the use of middle-class Indian youth. They found that this group typically watched television to relax and they often watched with their family, insuring parental supervision (Verma & Larson, 2002).

When watching television with their families, the adolescents studied reported feeling

mildly happy, cheerful, and relaxed, with less social anxiety (Verma & Larson, 2002).

The researchers reported that television viewing might be displacing adolescents' other

activities (Verma & Larson, 2002). Warren et al. (2002) also researched different parental

mediation strategies—co-viewing, restrictive mediation, and instructive mediation—and

the way gender, age, marital status, employment status, and parents' educational

background affected parental mediation. They found that co-viewing increased

dramatically with adolescents, but the decline in rulemaking and discussion was equally

dramatic at that age (Warren et al., 2002).

Carlson et al. (2001) recently looked at mothers' influences on television use.

This study supported previous research that found that parental styles played a role in

determining the way mothers socialize their children about television (Carlson et al.,

2001). The findings of this study confirmed the idea that children raised in certain

socialization environments (parental styles) exhibit different beliefs about the types of

television interventions that their mothers support (Carlson et al., 2001). Another study

looked at the way parental co-viewing can affect a child's political socialization (Austin

et al., 2001). This study suggested that television could be a useful tool for political

socialization, although it says that it plays a somewhat complex and indirect role (Austin

et al., 2001).

In Larson's (2001) study, she examined nearly six hundred commercials within

children's programming and how they addressed stereotypes and violence. More than 34

percent of the commercials featuring children did include aggression (Larson, 2001).

When girls were present in the commercials, interactions were almost always

cooperative—girls were also portrayed in primarily domestic settings (Larson, 2001).

Research on violence has recently focused on children's interpretations of violent acts; one study looked at the difference a child's age made on his or her interpretation of the television violent act (Krcmar & Cooke, 2001). They found that younger children viewed unpunished violence as more justified than punished violence and that older children were somewhat more likely to perceive a violent act as justified if the act was provoked (Krcmar & Cooke, 2001). Research has also been conducted on other types of media in relation to violence and aggression, such as video games (Sherry, 2001). That analysis suggests that there is a correlation between video games and aggression, however that relationship is smaller than that found for television and aggression games (Sherry, 2001). Another study (Nathanson, 2000) looked at how aggression-promoting effects can be reduced after children watched violent cartoons. It found that increasing children's fictional involvement with the victim of televised violence had a significant impact on children's interpretation of the cartoon (Nathanson, 2000).

Other studies have focused on the negative health effects television viewing has on children and adolescents. One study (Bar-on et al., 2001) described the possible negative effects such as aggressive behavior, substance use, sexual activity, obesity, poor body image, and decreased school performance. This study acknowledged there may be potential benefits from viewing some television shows that promote positive aspects of social behavior (Bar-on et al., 2001). Other studies have looked at how children's perceptions of the world are drawn from television portrayals. Jantarakolica et al., (2002) found that children who watch television more frequently perceive shows and television in general as more realistic. Van Aarle (2000) examined how youth balanced television

use and interpersonal relationships; she concluded that today's youngsters are not anti-social—they prefer real friends to the company of machines. However, television and other electronic media were found to play an important role in youth's lives (Van Aarle, 2000).

The research in this area has largely been framed in an accusatory light. This study presents social issues surrounding the topic of children and television, with no focus on negative aspects such as violence or obesity.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

This study focused on youth and their television use. Students were asked questions about how they used television and the research was driven by the question: "Would you give up television for $1 million dollars?" The previous chapter reviewed literature on the uses and gratifications and socialization theories. This chapter will explain, analyze, and justify the research methods employed by the researcher to ensure a credible, ethical, and accurate data collection.

Research Overview

The data gathered for this thesis was collected in four steps: the personal essay, followed by the media journal, then in-depth interviews, and finally focus groups. First, the nineteen students were asked to write a short essay answering the question: "Would you stop watching television for one million dollars? Half a million dollars? Why or why not?" These essays were then given to the researcher.

Then the students were asked to keep a media use journal for one school week, from 31 March 2003–4 April 2003. Every morning they would record what media they used and how long they used it the previous day. They recorded how much television they watched and the names of the shows; how much time they spent on the Internet and the web sites they visited; how many hours they watched movies and which ones they viewed; and how long they played video games and the names of the ones they played. The students' records were used to assess how much television the students watched on

average each day. The media journals and personal essays drove the focus of the in-depth interviews.

The researcher began collecting data in April 2003 and finished in May 2003. The data was collected during the school and in the classroom or in the computer lab next to the classroom. The in-depth interviews and focus groups were fully transcribed for analysis.

Focus groups with the students were conducted to get extended explanations and reasoning from the students. Through these groups the children explain the reasons that drive them to watch television and their thoughts about watching it. The focus groups were conducted during the day at their school. The focus groups were conducted after the in-depth interviews to see if the children changed their opinions in front of a group of their peers.

There were six children in each focus group (one group would have had seven participants in it, but one student was absent because of illness). The participants were organized into groups according to amount of television they watched each day, according to the media use journals they kept. The six students in the light viewer group watched less than one hour of television each day, according to their reports. The students in the moderate group watched on average between 1-1.83 hours of television each day, according to their media use journals. The students in the heavy use group watched an average of 4-8.4 hours of television each day, according to their self-reports.

Description of Subjects

A sixth grade class at Timpanogos Academy, a charter elementary school in Lindon, Utah, was the group researched for this study. Twenty-four students were given

permission slips for their involvement with this research; of those, nineteen agreed to participate and returned his/her permission slip signed by the student and parent/guardian.

The students who participated in this research were a convenience sample—gathered at school where both the teacher and principal supported the research. The charter school in Lindon, Utah, had some interesting characteristics. First of all, the students were from different cities in Utah County. Seven were from Lindon, six were from Orem, two were from American Fork, two were from Lehi, and two were from Pleasant Grove. The elementary school was a charter school, which is like a public school, funded by the state government and overseen by the Utah State Office of Education (timpacademy.org). Parents who wanted to have their children enrolled at this school had to apply. Another characteristic of this school was that its students wore uniforms. The students who attended this school were all residents of Utah County—the median income of households there is $45,833, whereas the median income of households in the United States is $41,994 (quickfacts.census.gov). The students also were from a predominantly Mormon community. According to The American Religion Data Archive, 324,790 of 368,536 residents (88 percent) living in Utah County are members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (thearda.com). The students all had attended public schools the year before—Timpanogos Academy was in its first year when the research was collected.

Participants

Nineteen students, ages 11-13, were involved in the research—although one was sick and not able to participate in the focus group. There were eleven females and eight males—these are their descriptions:

Table 1: Research Participants

Student number	Gender	Age	Siblings**
1	Female	12	Has three brothers and one sister.
2	Female	12	Has three brothers and one sister.
3*	Female	12	Has one sister.
4	Male	13	Has one brother and one sister.
5	Female	11	Has one brother and two sisters.
6	Male	12	Has two brothers and two sisters.
7	Male	12	Has three brothers and one sister.
8	Female	12	Has three brothers and one sister.
9	Male	12	Has one brother and one sister.
10	Male	12	Has two brothers and four sisters.
11	Female	11	Has three brothers and two sisters.
12	Female	12	Has one brother and one sister.
13	Male	12	Has two brothers and two sisters.
14	Female	11	Has one sister.
15	Male	12	Has two brothers and two sisters.
16	Female	12	Has two brothers and two sisters.
17	Female	12	Has three brothers and one sister.
18	Female	12	Has two brothers and one sister.
19	Male	12	Has one brother and two sisters.

* Student 3 participated in the essay, media journal, and interview, but was taken out of school just before the focus group due to illness.
** The average size of families in Utah in 2000 was 3.13 persons per household, while the national average was 2.59 persons per household, and in Utah County the average was 3.59 persons per household. The average family size for the research participants was generally above the Utah, Utah County, and national average (quickfacts.census.gov).

Qualitative research

The data for this research was collected qualitatively. This section will describe the steps the researcher took in gathering the information as well as explain the methods that justify their use. Qualitative methods are best when someone is studying a complex phenomenon that cannot be reduced to certain variables on a survey (Murray, 1998). McCracken (1991) wrote, "Qualitative methods are most useful and powerful when they are used to discover how the respondent sees the world" (p. 21). Overall, this process provides rich descriptions of phenomena; tracks unique or unexpected events; illuminates experiences and interpretations of events; gives voice to those whose views are rarely heard; conducts explorations into new theory development; and moves toward explanations (Sofaer, 1999). McCracken (1991) said, "When the questions for which data are sought are likely to cause the respondent greater difficulty and imprecision, the broader, more flexible net provided by qualitative techniques is appropriate" (p. 17).

The qualitative process seeks to compartmentalize and understand human opinion and shared meaning. Researchers have put it this way:

Qualitative research is concerned with interpretative processes in social contexts. … The qualitative paradigm assumes that human beings organize their social behavior on the basis of shared meanings that are understood and negotiated through the reflexive use of language and other symbolic resources. Methods of qualitative research seek to comprehend these processes of sense making by participating in their production in ways that are both systematic and flexible. (Lindlof & Meyer, 1998, p. 243)

This research explores social aspects of children's television use and qualitative research is necessary to uncover the shared meanings and understandings. While quantitative research may survey terrain, qualitative research mines it (McCracken, 1991). It offers a glimpse into the complicated character, organization, and logic of culture (McCracken, 1991).

Autodriving

Two methods were used in the initial stage of this research: personal essays and media journals. The personal essays and media journals would later serve as a springboard into the interview. This is referred to as autodriving, where self-reflected activities drive the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this case, the personal essays and media journals the students wrote and kept in class drove the in-depth interviews. McCracken (1991) summed up the autodriving process: "The respondent is asked to comment on a picture, video or some other stimulus, and to provide his or her own account of what they see there" (p. 37). Another variation is to have the respondent prepare his or her own stimulus and then provide a commentary—as was done in the case of this research with the personal essays and media journals (McCracken, 1991). This method is effective because people become somewhat self-conscious and want to explain, elaborate, and justify themselves and what they wrote (Heisley & Levy, 1991).

For this research, the media journals and personal essays enriched the data gathering process because of the participants willingness to elaborate their previous thoughts; autodriving is a good when collecting data about consumption habits (Heisley & Levy, 1991). This technique is a newer approach and has been touted as extremely useful, yet highly obtrusive (McCracken, 1991). As McCracken (1991) explained,

"Autodriving is a useful prompting strategy because it helps to both foreground and objectify aspects of the respondents' experience that are otherwise difficult to bring into the interview" (p. 37).

The personal essays helped the researcher understand the students' initial views on the million-dollar question and helped the researcher tailor specific questions for the in-depth interview. The media journal was used also in the in-depth interviews when the researcher reviewed it with the student and used it to generate conversation with the student about what he/she watched when keeping the journal.

In-depth Interviews

In-depth interviews are a way to gather information on a person's thoughts and opinions in a face-to-face setting (Minichiello et al., 1995). They allow for a detailed exploration and explanation of beliefs, attitudes, and feelings (Murray, 1998). In interviews, the researcher needs to hear the meaning of what is being said by listening carefully to discern the meanings, interpretations, and understandings that will let the researcher into the respondent's world (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). McCraken (1991) explains that techniques like interviews are most useful and powerful when used to discover how the respondent sees the world. Minichiello et al. (1995) said that in order to understand people, one has to discover their beliefs, wishes, feelings, desires, fears, and intentions—the contents of their minds. They (1995) continue:

> These contents make up a system which can only be known by inference. To grasp the way such a system works is to be able to interpret the meaning of someone's actions. One of the best forms of evidence for such inferences is the in-depth interview. (p. 22)

A researcher needs to decide on how he/she is going to structure the interview. This research used partially structured interviews—they can be more flexible and open to how the conversation leads the interviewer and interviewee. Lincoln and Guba (1985) wrote, "The structured interview is the mode of choice when he or she does not know and can therefore frame appropriate questions to find it out, while the unstructured interview is the mode of choice when the interviewer does not know what he or she doesn't know and must therefore rely on the respondent to tell him or her" (p. 269). When using a focused/semi-structured interview, the moderator should have an interview guide with the list of question topics, without fixed wording or ordering (Minichiello et al., 1995).

In interviews, the researcher has to get depth, focus, and detail. Through elaborations, explanations, stories, and details, the interviewer will gain an accurate description and look into the interviewee's world (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Lincoln and Guba (1985) call in-depth interviews a conversation with a purpose. They continue:

> The purposes for doing an interview include, among others, obtaining here-and-now constructions of persons, events, activities, organizations, feelings, motivations, claims, concerns, and other entities; reconstructions of such entities as experienced in the past; projections of such entities as they are expected to be experienced in the future; verification, emendation, and extension of information. (p. 268)

The researcher who is conducting the interview needs to approach the interview carefully. He/she needs to build initial relationships of trust as they are starting out an interview. The interviewer also needs to be non-threatening, but professional (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). The interviews should be guided conversations: the researcher and

respondent take turns speaking, there are smooth transitions between subjects, misunderstandings followed by conversational repairs, and great depth, detail, and description (Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

Some advantages of in-depth interviews are: the interviewer and interviewee are spending time one-on-one, this enables a bond to form, and the interviewee might be more willing to disclose private information to the researcher; an in-depth interview can give great description and detail to the researcher; and it can be more accurate than a simple questionnaire (Quible, 1998; Wimmer & Dominick, 2000).

Like any methodology, there are some problems researchers might run into when using interviews as their methodology. As Lincoln and Guba (1985) put it:

The implementer of the naturalistic study must deal with several inevitable problems: managing problem/contract disjunctions, dealing with aspects of unfolding design, and managing field problems. The naturalist's lot is not an easy one. To suggest that persons engage in naturalistic inquiry because it is so much easier and less rigorous than conventional inquiry is to betray ignorance of what is actually involved. (p. 288)

More specifically, one disadvantage is that the data collector can't know with certainty that the respondent is telling the truth (Minichiello et al., 1995). Researchers have also been concerned with the fact that participants may feel pressured to give socially acceptable answers (Crowe & Marlow, 1964). Additionally, participant's responses cannot be generalized beyond the population researched in a specific study (Byers & Wilcox, 1991). When a researcher has gathered all of his/her data, then he/she will go through the transcripts and open the information to interpretation. This could lead

to an analysis problem—different people can come up with different explanations of the data (Minichiello et al., 1995).

Focus Groups

The focus group methodology is another effective way of gathering data for this situation because researchers can get feedback on shared impressions (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Focus groups have characteristics that allow for good discussions among people. One benefit of focus groups is that statements and ideas spark off one another—a statement by one group member may trigger a thought or validation by another member (Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

A successful focus group should be in a comfortable setting where people feel like they can share their thoughts without reservation and with a moderator who can lead the group well. It's best to interview eight to twelve people in each group (Morrison, 1998). The moderator sets the tone for the group and much of the success of the group is on his/her shoulders. If he or she is stiff, uncomfortable, or vague, then the responses will not be as effective as they could be. The moderator has the responsibility to encourage interaction, guide the conversation, probe for meanings and explanations, keep the group focused, and ensure everyone has the opportunity to speak (Quible, 1998). The moderator is also in charge of putting together a guide of questions that he/she is going to ask during the group to help keep it focused on the topic (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). He/she also needs to be empathetic and knowledgeable on the subject, but not biased (Quible, 1998). The moderator is in charge of making sure everyone has an opportunity to voice their opinions; sometimes there are a few people in the group who want to dominate the discussion (Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

The moderator introduces the topic, throws out a few questions, and keeps the group on track (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). The moderator needs to be a good listener, empathetic, and tactful—challenging questions are inappropriate because they make the respondent feel that he/she is not the expert on his/her experiences (Murray, 1998). The focus group discussion usually starts with more general questions and as the group progresses the topics become more focused (Murray, 1998).

Focus groups have the basic advantages and disadvantages of qualitative research. Focus groups have numerous advantages: they can serve as a basis for a quantitative survey; that can be conducted fairly quickly; they are relatively low-cost; the questions asked are flexible; broad topics can be covered; and the responses are complete and less inhibited than responses from individual interviews (Wimmer & Dominick, 2000). As mentioned earlier, one person's answer may spark a thought of another respondent—it can be effective because the other people's comments can bring out ideas that the moderator could not have gathered on his/her own.

There are some disadvantages as well. First, while it can be used as background work for quantitative research, it cannot be used to gather quantitative data (Bruseberg & McDonagh, 2003). Also there can be trouble controlling the respondents. In any group conversation or discussion people tend to take on different roles. That's true for focus groups as well. There can be people who dominate the conversations; there will be people who are more hesitant to speak up at all; there may be people who are obnoxious or rude; others may just be such a "follower" and always agreeing with whatever is being said (Bruseberg & McDonagh, 2003).

Strengths can also be turned into weaknesses. While an advantage of focus groups mentioned earlier is that people have the opportunity to bounce ideas off one another, which spark people's thoughts—this can also be detrimental. The focus group can go off on tangents, which can result in data that is completely unrelated to the research questions and hypotheses (Bruseberg & McDonagh, 2003). The moderator needs to recognize the fine line between useful information and tangents and keep the group on track.

There can also be some pressure for the respondents to give answers they feel are socially acceptable. In focus groups there is a greater pressure to give these answers than in an anonymous questionnaire or personal interview (Crowe & Marlow, 1964). It's important that the moderator makes everyone feel comfortable and that the environment is one where people can be open and honest about their feelings and experiences.

Recent articles, such as Green's (1999), have assessed the strengths and weaknesses of focus groups and individual interviews. Green (1999) wrote that focus groups have become the preferred research technique for industry-driven and commercial investigations into qualitative issues. They are enticing because of their time effectiveness and diversity, but are also often criticized because of the great amount of dependence placed on the moderator (Green, 1999). Interviews are sometimes characterized as less rigorous and professional; however, Green (1999) suggests that the in-depth interview is a more robust methodology for communication research.

Similar Studies

A few recent studies have used focus groups to analyze how children interpret tobacco advertisements. One of these studies, by Hawkins and Hane (2001), looked at

how middle-school-aged girls perceived cigarette ads—the researchers collected their data through focus groups and categorized five themes that emerged. Another study by Booth-Butterfield et al. (2000) also used focus group interviews to examine perceived messages from the students' (both boys and girls) school systems regarding tobacco use. Another study used focus groups to find how youth interpret and respond to television alcohol advertisements (Waiters et al., 2001). Vaccaro and Slanemyr (1998) set out to determine whether or not children fully understand commercials; they used focus group to discover the children's responses and found that the younger children, ages four to seven, could not understand the purpose or separate the advertisements from the program. Another focus group analysis explored how children understood conflict (Hale, 1995). Adams (2000) used focus groups to compare how people watch television; he found viewing to be a complicated mix of both the passive and active theories.

Bachen and Illouz (1996) explored the relationship between children's imagined concepts of love and romance shaped by the media; they interviewed 183 children ages eight to seventeen to gather their data. Using in-depth interviews, Acosta-Alzuru and Kreshel (2002) researched girls who own a certain brand of dolls and explored how girls create identity through consumption of texts and products.

Data Collection and Analysis

Questions Asked

In the personal interviews, the researcher used the essays and media journals to autodrive the conversation. The interviews and focus groups were semi-structured; there were certain questions that came up in the interviews, but the researcher also followed through and explored other points the students brought up. All interviews started off with

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a conversation about the million-dollar vs. television question. After the interviews were complete, the focus groups were held. A complete list of the questions asked is in Appendix B.

Gaining Trust

Developing trust is an important task for the inquirer—it will make the study go more smoothly and encourage the respondents to be more open and candid (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Trust is a reciprocal exchange between the interviewer and interviewee; trust depends on the respondent's perception of a "good guy" image—the respondent who perceives that will view his/her involvement as fulfilling a personal need (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The person being interviewed needs to trust the researcher, especially if he or she will be sharing personal information—some of which might be secretive or emotional. When a researcher tells respondents that their answers are anonymous that encourages trust in the relationship (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The participants in this study may have felt comfortable with the researcher because she had been a guest lecturer a few months earlier to talk with them about writing and editing. Also, the researcher spent time in the classroom each morning (during the data collection) as the students were coming to class and completing their morning exercises.

Prolonged engagement and persistent observation

Prolonged engagement is a requirement that helps meet the trustworthiness criteria; it shows that the research has spent enough time to achieve his/her research purposes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba (1985) explain, "Prolonged engagement also requires that the investigator be involved with a site sufficiently long to detect and take account of distortions that might otherwise creep into the data" (p. 302).

It's important to spend an appropriate amount of time with the group being research, but it shouldn't be too long—spending too much time could also skew the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). By conducting the research with different methodologies—the personal essay, media journal, in-depth interview, and focus group—the researcher was able to gather sufficient data.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) said, "If prolonged engagement provides scope, persistent observations provides depth" (p. 304). The purpose of persistent observation is for the researcher to be able to recognize characteristics and elements in the environment being studied that are most applicable to the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As the researcher observed the students, she witnessed the students' interactions and how they treated one another. She noticed which students were more popular and extroverted and the ones who were more reserved. Through observing their relations with their peers and teacher, the researcher was able to have a better understanding of the students' personalities. Knowing these characteristics helped the researcher as she analyzed and construed the students' comments from the data collection.

Establishing trustworthiness and validity

The researcher took several measures to ensure accurate data collection. When the students kept a media journal they recorded their media use first thing every morning for the previous day. The chances of getting accurate answers are better the more recent the questions are answered—it's easy for participants to remember what they did the previous day, but what they did three weeks ago is harder to recall (Sparks, 2002). After consulting with the teacher, the researcher felt that it was best to have the teacher

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supervise the recording of the media journals because the teacher feared that if the

students were asked to keep the media journal on their own the students would forget.

Some researchers are concerned that people might purposefully distort their

information. However, this can be avoided by promising that the respondents know their

answers are completely confidential. Sparks (2002) explained, "One of the primary

reasons that people might do this is because of social desirability. That is, they may want

to make themselves look good for the researchers" (p. 62). The students were reassured

that their answers would remain anonymous and were assigned numbers in which they

were referred to, instead of their names. Collecting material that supports the collected

data—other interviews, observations, and documents—is another way to ensure

trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher kept a log of observations and

thoughts during the data collection and also interviewed the class' teacher about her

perceptions of the students and their data. The teacher shared descriptions, insights, and

stories with the researcher about the sixth grade students to help the researcher

understand the culture and personality of the class. The researcher also spent time

watching popular television shows—such as *Lizzy McGuire* and *Spongebob*

Squarepants—that the students mentioned in their interviews.

Triangulation improves validity—this is accomplished through using different

sources, methods, investigators, and theories (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). When using more

than one method, the shortcomings are defeated through capitalizing on the individual

strengths (Minichiello, 1995). Specifically, Michell (1999) explained that using focus

groups and in-depth interviews together is especially useful when researching social

topics with peers. The use of triangulation in this research—the personal essays, media journals, in-depth interviews, and focus groups—greatly adds to the validity of it.

If research has internal validity, then it offers an adequate account of the evidence the research has produced. Dey (1999) elaborates:

> The traditional criteria of validity, concerned with the logical structure of arguments, the fit between concepts and what is observed, the fit of the data with other evidence, and the consistency of the concepts used with those of other theories. (p. 246)

A test of the theory's validity is "the test of a theory lies less in its general truth than in its practical adequacy in particular circumstances" (Dey, 1999, p. 233). If there is contradictory evidence in the research, then it is not going to seem credible—it will sound incomplete and confusing (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Validity requirements were met because the conclusions the research came to were consistent with established theories, such as the uses and gratifications theory. The grounded theory that emerged also complemented the needs pre-adolescents have at this time in their development.

To confirm that an argument is convincing, a researcher needs to make sure that it is supported by evidence. Rubin and Rubin (1995) said, "If research is valid, it closely reflects the world being described." (p. 85). Another way the validity of this research was established was through a peer audit. Excerpts from the transcripts were given to the teacher of the class studied; she read over them and agreed that the students' answers seemed like something that particular student would say. The descriptions of her students were cogent and logical to the teacher who knew her students best and daily observed and interacted with them.

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It's important for researchers to remember the limitations of grounded theory. They are in charge of "assessing the quality and completeness of analysis, managing large amounts of unstructured textual data, and accounting for a basis for theoretical sampling" (Star, 1998, p. 225). It can be a huge task to find structure and meaning in large quantities of data. However, the great strength of this type of research, though, is that people are enabled to describe their feelings without limits, and that meanings can be explored through the words of the interviewees, instead of the observer (Sofaer, 1999). The openness of the research moves past generalized answers and delves into constructed views and personal beliefs on a particular subject.

Data analysis

With all that information collected, the researcher went through an interpretive analysis process, resulting in grounded theory. Grounded theory appears after the data has been collected and analyzed, whereas quantitative research starts with a theory and relies on the fixed applications and predictive requirements (Minichiello, 1995). Instead the grounded theory emerges after the data has been collected (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The resulting theories from qualitative research explain the nature of phenomena as humanly experienced, rather than reveal causal relationships (Minichiello, 1995). Strauss and Corbin (1990) further defined grounded theory:

> A grounded theory is one that is inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents. That is, it is discovered, developed, and provisionally verified through systematic data collection and analysis of data pertaining to that phenomenon. Therefore, data collection analysis, and theory stand in reciprocal relationship with each other. (p. 23)

General themes emerged in the research collected. The researcher keeps records of these and analyzes them. In this research, the information gathered was analyzed and theories emerged. These focus groups and in-depth interviews were analyzed through an interpretive analysis. Lincoln and Guba (1985) explained, "Inductive data analyses can be performed on a daily basis, so that insights, elements of theory, hypotheses, questions, gaps, can be identified and pursued" (p. 209). Through the analyzing process, similarities are sought out in the research in order to reveal commonalities between different people (Star, 1998).

Naturalistic inquiry is inductive inquiry. It involves understanding and making sense of the data a researcher collects.

> Grounded theory, that is, theory that follows from data rather than preceding them (as in conventional inquiry), is a necessary consequence of the naturalistic paradigm that posits multiple realities and makes transferability dependent on local contextual factors. No a priori theory could anticipate the many realties that the inquirer will inevitably encounter in the field, nor encompass the many factor that make a difference at the micro (local) level. (Lincoln & Guba, pp. 204–205)

The naturalistic paradigm requires that a theory emerges from research, rather than research driven by a theory. Though naturalistic inquiry is open, that doesn't mean the research shouldn't have a focus—but having a too-strict focus can also be a problem (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

"We learn how to kiss, or to drink, talk to our buddies—all the things that
you can't really teach in social studies or history—we all learn them at the movies."
–Jack Nicholson, Reader's Digest, *April 2003, p. 24*

The research collected for this study focused on youth and their television use. Students were asked questions about how they used television and the research was driven by the question posed to sixth grade students: "Would you give up television for one million dollars?" The previous chapters discussed the literature relating to this subject and the specific research methods that were taken with the students to gather the data. This chapter looks at the findings—what the children said and the basis for the grounded theory that emerged from the research.

Analysis

To best understand the context of the students' answers and explanations, the charts depicting their general feelings toward television are presented first. This is followed by qualitative data.

Throughout the data collection, the students were asked the million-dollar question. Their answers from the personal essay, interview, and focus group are recorded in the following tables. The students were divided into three groups for the focus group methodology depending on how much television they watched as recorded in their media journals. Students who watched less than one hour were placed in the light viewer group, those who watched 1–3.9 hours of television were placed in the medium viewing group, and the students who watched 4 or more hours of television each day were placed in the

heavy viewing group. This arrangement was done so students could relate to the viewing experiences of their peers better and encourage a stronger dialogue in the focus groups.

Table 2 records the light viewers' responses to the million-dollar question throughout the data collection. Through the process of discussing the question with each other, some of the students rethought their previous answers; their final decision, given during the focus group, was the culmination of their reflection during the research. Table 2 illustrates how their answers changed through the different methodologies. "TV" represents that the students chose to keep the television of the one million dollars during each data collection and "$" means the students would take the money over the television.

Table 2: Light Viewers

Student	Personal essay	Interview	Focus group
6	TV	TV	TV
8	TV	$	$
10	$	TV	$
11	$	$	$
16	TV	TV	TV
19	$	$	TV

Table 3 depicts the answers the medium viewers of television gave during the

data collection. The students who were the medium viewers watched 1–3.9 hours of

television each day, according to their self-reports.

Table 3: Medium Viewers

Student	Personal essay	Interview	Focus group
1	$	$	TV
4	$	$	$
7	TV	TV	$
14	$	$	TV
15	TV	$	$
17	$	$	$

Table 4 shows the answers the heaviest viewers of television gave during the

research collection. The students in the heaviest group watched 4 or more hours of

television each day, according to their self-reports.

Table 4: Heavy Viewers

Student	Personal essay	Interview	Focus group
2	$	TV	TV
5	$	$	TV
9	TV	TV	TV
12	TV	TV	TV
13	TV	TV	$*
18	$	$	TV

* This student said he would keep the television if the economy were better.

Overview of Grounded Theory

Throughout the research, three major themes emerged from the data collection. Factors that influenced the students' media consumption included reasons such as: television offers potential for them to develop connections with celebrities, television is an activity they can talk about and participate in with friends, and television gives them role models to imitate. In a previous chapter, the needs youth have were examined. Some of those needs included friendship, intimacy, and the opportunity to learn about the group they were being socialized into. What youth need and what television offers can fit together in a complementary relationship illustrated below.

Table 5: Overview of Grounded Theory

Youth need:	Television offers:
Friendship	Potential to develop connections with celebrities
Intimacy	An activity they can do with friends
	Something to talk about with friends
To learn about the new group they're being socialized into	Role models to imitate

Youth need friendship/ Television offers potential to develop connections with celebrities

When people form a one-way relationship with a character or personality on television, that is referred to as a parasocial relationship (Perse & Rubin, 1989). Throughout this research, the students would refer to characters and celebrities in a way that almost sounded like they were talking about their friends. There were some students who watched television when (or because) they had limited outside interaction with peers; television filled a functional void in their lives. Other students simply had fantasies about have a connection to fame and bonding with celebrities.

Student 9 said when he was younger he didn't watch as much television as he does now.

Student 9: When I was younger I like to play outside. Now that I'm older, I like to watch TV more.

R: How did that start?

9: When more of my friends couldn't play any more.

R: So you turned to TV and movies?

9: Yeah.

Situations like Student 9's can be prime for developing parasocial relationships because the person is missing friends and turning to television to replace them. For Student 9, his television time was a replacement for friendship when his friends were busy—maybe that's why it was so valuable to him. He watched an average of 6.8 hours each day, according to his self-report, and he said he would keep the television in each of the three data collections.

In the focus group with the heavy television viewers, there was a group of three girls who were close friends; they also dominated the discussion during the focus group because they were sharing stories about their television experiences. A couple of times during the group, they began talking about good-looking celebrities. The first person they gushed about was actor Orlando Bloom, who played Legolas in the *Lord of the Ring* movies, and shed insight on some of their wishful relationships with him.

Student 5: I kind of want him (Legolas/Orlando Bloom) to be my husband.

Student 12: When me and my little sister watched that (*Lord of the Ring*), we would fight over that guy so much. …We were watching in our house though on

DVD. I'm like, 'No, he's my boyfriend!' We would fight over it so much. We'd be like, 'No, my boyfriend!' 'No, my boyfriend!' And I know I'm supposed to be bigger than her—he's just so cute!

5: Well, like last year, my stepsister, she would always come to our house on the weekend and stuff. Me and my friend had a crush on Aaron Carter, 'cause he was really cute the first year he came out; now he's kinda ugly. But me and my sister would fight over him. I'd be like, 'No, he's my boyfriend, you cannot take him! He's mine. No. No. Go away.' And I'd shove her out of my room. It was so funny.

12: We'd never get him anyway.

It's interesting that Student 12 acknowledge that dating him was highly unlikely when she made the statement that they could never "get him." The students had celebrity crushes, and were willing to fight with their friends and siblings over who would have the privilege of calling the certain celebrity her boyfriend. A little later the girls talked more about their crushes on males in the media.

R: What if you had met him (Aaron Carter) when you liked him?

Student 5: I'd kinda be like, 'Hey, my sister has a big crush on you.' He'd be like, 'Uh-huh, really?' And I'd be like, 'So do I.' Oh my gosh, Chris from Dream Street is so hot!

Student 12: Oh my gosh! I was going to say that. I have a shrine almost of him. It has a picture of him and then he's like in his little sunglasses and he has them down—he's so cute.

5: I know—I've seen it on her wall. Oh I love him. And then he's got a new song with Clay, and he hugged him.

12: He hugged Rosie; how could he do that to me?

5: I know!

12: I hate him now, not really. He's still cute.

5: Yeah, he's hot.

In their conversation they talk about how they were jealous when they saw a singer from Dream Street (a teenage boy band) hug another girl—their feelings of jealously indicate they feel the have a relationship with him and in their minds Aaron Carter's hugs should be for them. Student 12 rhetorically asks, "How could he do that to me?" She implies that he is somehow cheating on her when they've never met or dated.

These romantic relationships formed by these girls were fantasies that resulted from their heavy involvement with the media. As people spend time watching media, they have a greater opportunity to view characters and celebrities, which only strengthens their feelings of camaraderie with the personas. Some of these students may have fantasized about relationships with these personalities not only to fulfill their need for friendship, but it also could help them feel more popular. By claiming a character—one who's famous and good-looking—as a "boyfriend", then girls were boosting their ego and attachment to that person. They also were fulfilling their needs for friendship through their parasocial fantasies.

Aside from romantic relationships, some students felt platonic connections with television characters. One popular television show, Disney's *Lizzy McGuire,* follows Lizzy, a teenage girl, who has an alter ego in the form of a cartoon character who makes

comments throughout the show and expresses Lizzy's thoughts to the audience. Student 1 specifically said she liked watching *Lizzy McGuire* because the character talked with the camera, and it felt like she was confiding with the watcher.

> Student 1: I like the ones (shows) where they (the characters) talk to you, and it's like they're magical or something.
>
> R: Why do you like that?
>
> 1: 'Cause it's just like—you get to see their life and when they talk to someone like, you can see what's going on. It's weird. It's just weird because you can put your life in their shoes and see how it's like.

Student 1's connection with this television character came from experiencing Lizzy's life so closely that Student 1 felt like she could picture herself in Lizzy's television life.

Student 1 also talked about the feelings that she has when she's watching or reading an emotional movie or book. She said she cries when someone dies. When she read the book *Tuck Everlasting*, she cried and she said that when she saw the movie she cried even harder. "I have no idea why I cried," she explained, "because it it's not me who is dying or anything." She mentioned that it might happen because she gets connected to the characters because "you know what they're feeling because they've been talking to yourself or something." Student 1, who was a medium television viewer, said she felt a connection to the characters because of their self-disclosure to the audience.

The emotional connection Student 1 felt with characters fueled the feelings of friendship between herself and the characters. Television allows people into the most personal aspects of characters lives—their successes, failures, relationships, homes, etc.

Because the audience knows so much about certain characters and celebrities that are shown on television, it doesn't seem that unnatural for someone to have a parasocial relationship. Because of the anxiety produced at this period in their lives, students may guard themselves in their interaction with others for fear of rejection. But when they are introduced to someone, such as a television character who openly shares his/her thoughts and life, it may allow them to see into another's life in a way they've never experienced and without the complications or pressures a real relationship entails.

'TV loves me'

Some of the students expressed affection for their television. Student 2 was the heaviest television viewer out of every student interviewed in the data collection, who reported watching an average of 8.4 hours each day. Student 2 drew a picture on her media journal that said, "TV loves me and I love TV!" complete with hearts. When asked why television loved her, she responded, "Because I watch it a lot, so it's like, 'Oh cool, we have a person that loves me.' So they love me back because I love them. You can't hate someone that likes you."

Student 12 also said she loved television because it was her friend. Student 12 was another heavy television viewer (watching 5.4 hours each day, according to her self-report) and she was also a close friend of Student 2. At the bottom of Student 12's essay, she drew a picture that said "I love TV." When asked why she loved television so much, she explained, "It's my friend. I always watch it. ... You watch it, and you can relate to it sometimes. … It's just really fun to watch TV." Later in the interview, her deep feelings for television surfaced again:

R: Why (could you not give up television for one million dollars)?

Student 12: Because, you watch TV so much and without TV, oh my goodness …

what else would you do? What else could you do?! You'd have to make up your

own things to do. That would be so hard. I think it would be fun to not watch it

for a week or something and see what would happen. See if I go crazy or not. Or

something like that. But I don't think I could ever give it up. Because I watch it so

much, I depend on it just to give me entertainment. I would never give it away for

a million dollars. … I just love it.

R: Is there anything else you would like to say?

12: I love TV.

R: That's your statement?

12:Yes. It is a part of my life. Yes, it is a part of me.

Student 12's love for television could have stemmed from the fact that she was so

dependant on it and because it provided her with valued entertainment. She referred to

television as being her friend—she spent a lot of time with her set, only two students in

the class watched more television than she did, according to their media journals. Student

12 also said that she could relate to television, which may have encouraged her feelings

of friendship—and additionally love—with it.

These feelings of wanting friendship and intimacy aren't surprising for the pre-

adolescents. These students, however, had formed such a bond with their televisions—

one they thought was so deep, that they felt its love. The girls spent an excessive amount

of time watching television, and felt like the television reciprocated their love. The

comment Student 2 made, "You can't hate someone that likes you," also illustrates that

forming relationships was important—there was no fear of rejection from the television

because of her deep adoration for it. To these students television was a constant, stable "friend." They were allowed inside its world where there was no risk involved and where they didn't have to invest of themselves in that relationship.

Youth need group affiliation/ Television offers something to do with friends and something to talk about friends

Television and friendships

During the second focus group with the heavy television users, three girls who were quite good friends were in the same group—Students 2, 5, and 12. Even before the first question was asked, the three girls were cramming themselves into two seats around the table where the discussion was held. One girl explained that they were like sisters, so they could sit close together during the focus group. Then the three girls started singing the theme song to *Sister, Sister*, a syndicated television show aired on the Disney Channel. Throughout the focus group the three girls spoke about their favorite television shows and movies—if one said something, another would often add her opinion. These girls all watched the same show and bonded over the fact that they knew the same theme song and were singing together. When they sang the song together, it showed the other students in the group that the three of them were friends and the other students weren't included in their group.

Student 12 seemed to place a high level of importance on relationships in her personal interview. She talked a lot about friendship and popularity in the context of television. She observed:

I don't know why I do this, but when I can't sleep I always think about TV …

Just last night I couldn't sleep, and I was thinking about, how many people are

popular on *Lizzy McGuire*. And the only show that a girl is popular on is *Kim Possible*. And no one really watches that show that I know. Lizzy McGuire is like a nerd kinda. She's not like the biggest nerd; she's just kind of like a nobody. And it's a show about her and how she likes the boys and wants to be popular. That's why people like it, because probably people like people that aren't popular than the people that are. So they like to watch it. So they are like watching it and it's like they can relate to it. But Kim Possible, she's popular. She's a popular cheerleader, and everyone likes her. And not a lot of people watch that show.

Student 12 had observed that her peers were drawn to shows with unpopular characters because they could relate to the popularity struggles they faced. It's interesting that they seemed to turn to the shows with characters who were less accepted and used that common bond to gain acceptance with one another. The youth's identities are fluctuating at this stage in life—and being popular is a high priority and concern. Because of apprehension about their image, they can feel a bond with those characters who aren't popular and be drawn to shows that focus around those types of characters.

Student 13 was a very serious and matter-of-fact male. He said he watched less television than his friends, but he also didn't want to give up television because he thought it was becoming more common to earn that much money. He was confident that he could do that, without the help of the hypothetical "offer" presented in this research. He said he and his friends enjoyed playing video games.

R: Do you like hanging out with people who know about video games?

Student 13: Well, that's not what I base my friendships on. I base it on if I like

them, and if they are good people. But yeah, sure if they do it's great, if they don't

that's fine.

Student 13 acknowledged that sharing similar media interests with people aided

their friendship; however, he said he could still be friends even if they didn't like all the

same things. To him, a person's characteristics were more important than their hobbies.

The rest of this section will look at how the students specifically viewed

friendship and television. Their comments in this context generally fell into two

categories; the students referred to it as something to talk about with their friends and as

an activity to participate in with their friends.

Television as something to talk about with friends

Student 12 wrote in her essay that she wouldn't give up television for a million

dollars because she needed it to live. She wrote about her television schedule:

"I usually watch for 30 minutes every day! Then I go to school! And talk about TV

shows. All my friends think it's halliros [sic] how I've memorized tonz [sic] of shows

and there [sic] thyme [sic] songs!" For this heavy viewer (she reported watching an

average of 5.4 hours of television each day) television was something she not only talked

about with her friends, but it was also how she impressed them.

The media can be used as a common bond people share. Social capital refers to

the associations people have through social networks and how social ties make people's

lives more valuable (Putnam, 2000). This theory includes the ideas of how social capital

can help build bridges/reach out to others and how it can help bond people closer together

(Putnam, 2000). The students commented a lot on how conversations about television

occurred in social situations, emphasizing how these youth used this medium to strengthen their ties with one another. Student 12, who was a heavy television viewer, liked to show other people how she had memorized television theme songs—but in order for her friends to be impressed, they also would have to recognize and know the theme song she was singing.

Student 1 said she hadn't always been a big television fan, but when she became a more avid watcher, she had more friends:

> Actually, I never liked TV until about fifth grade, because from first grade to fourth grade I actually worked really hard on my homework. Then I started watching TV. … *It makes me have more friends*, and then I can concentrate on my homework and what's going on in school because I can watch those shows and see what's going on in other people's lives—so it kind of helps. … I didn't really have enough (friends) because I was such a goody-goody and stuff because I kept getting 'A's. Now I'm not, but I'm doing better. (emphasis added)

Student 1 said she believed that watching television shows made her more popular, even though her time in front of the television took her away from her homework and hurt her grades at school. This comment indicates the student recognizes a link between watching television and having friends—she may have intentionally sought it out with that result in mind. She believed that before she watched a lot of television, she wasn't very popular.

In equating her popularity with the amount of television she viewed, Student 1 trusts the television to provide her with social opportunities. Her ability to participate in the conversations because she watched television resulted in a better image. Like Student 12, Student 1 also used material from television shows to impress her friends. During her

personal interview, she also said she talks about the "funny parts" of television shows with her friends. She continued, "And then we sit there and do imitations of them. Then I can get my friend to laugh so hard; she's like passing out. It's so funny." Student 1 also said she imitates her friends when they get scared while watching a television show or movie. Through her imitations, she got the positive response—laughter—from her friends. This cycle reinforced itself with rewards and an ego-boost every time she did it. By talking and imitating the things Student 1 watched, she strengthened her friendships and self-esteem.

Student 3 said she talked about *Lizzy McGuire* with her cousin a lot—even though cousins technically are family members, whenever they were referred to in this research it was always in a context of friendship. None of the students who were interviewed lived with their cousins, so they were considered friends rather than family. Student 3 said that she and her cousin liked to talk about their favorite episodes, and the funny parts of the show—they also liked to predict what would happen on future episodes. Student 8 also mentioned that she and her friends liked to talk about what happened on Disney television shows like *Lizzy McGuire* and *Even Stevens*. To her, it was very illogical to give up television/movies if it would affect the things she could do with her friends.

Student 4 used current events as conversation facilitators with his friends. He also said he and his friends talk about jokes they heard on television show, and they do imitations of the *Simpsons* and *Fraiser*. He said that he and his friends would sometimes make popcorn and watch movies together. Student 4 said he enjoyed watching the news, and his media journal proved that as well. He said the news was a topic that came up a lot when he was talking with his friends at school. This research was collected during the

war with Iraq and Student 4 said he was interested in someday working in the military, so the news at this time was especially interesting to him. For this student, television specifically gave him knowledge and jokes he could later share with his friends.

Student 7 wrote in his personal essay that he and his friends were the biggest fans of *Spongebob Squarepants*. If he didn't have television, he wrote, "All my friends would say, 'Yo, have you seen the latest episode of *Spongebob*? Ha ha ha. No???? Dude, you're messed up.' He said that happened once and he was laughed at—he clarified that he wasn't really being mocked, but his friends were more shocked that he missed an episode.

> R: What if someone wanted to hang out with you, but he didn't watch *Spongebob Squarepants* …?
>
> Student 7: I don't know if I would like him or not.
>
> R: Why not?
>
> 7: Well, I'm just kidding, but … we're not that big of a fan, we just watch it all the time. … It just helps out.
>
> R: Would you kind of see if he wanted to watch it?
>
> 7: Yeah.

This student hinted that talking about certain television shows was a major part of his relationship with his friends. It's also interesting he mentioned that "it just helps out" if one of his friends likes *Spongebob Squarepants*—implying that it's easier to be friends with those who watch the same television shows. The need for friendship and affiliation with a group is what influenced this student's decision in taking the money or the

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television. Taking away the television would not only mean missing *Spongebob* episodes, but also it would also represent alienation from Student 7's friends.

Student 9 mentioned in his interview that he and his friends liked to talk about the funny parts of television episodes. In his personal essay, he wrote that the only way he would give up television was if he could rule the world—he said he enjoyed having power and telling people what to do. But he was adamant that he only give television up for power, not money. Student 9 said he first realized that he liked to be a leader when "I first started to be a leader with my old friends." To this student, television knowledge was equated with power. If he did have power instead of a television that would mean there were people listening and obeying him—so he would continue to have interaction with a group of people, because he would tell them what to do. Otherwise, television was the way Student 9 would chose to interact with peers.

Student 12, who said she couldn't live without television, brought up the fact that she talks with her friends about television—and it seemed to often involve subjects of appearance.

R: You just like to watch TV.

Student 12: Yeah. We always talk about it at school. We'll be like, 'Oh my gosh, Lizzy McGuire's hair, did you see it? It was so ugly that one time!' We talk about them if they are getting chubby or something.

R: Does that happen?

12: Yeah, Lizzy McGuire's getting chubby.

Student 12 mentioned multiple times that she often talked with her friends about things they saw on television. Her friends were very critical of appearances, which isn't unique

for youth at this stage. Through criticizing the way a character looked with her friends, they also could compare themselves to the characters. Their assessment of the characters, even the ones they liked, provided bonding opportunities and could additionally help them feel better about themselves at the same time. Television allows for a sense of superiority—watchers can critique or mock the characters' weaknesses. Viewers can do that to the television personas, but in reality being on the receiving end of mocking and criticism is not fun.

Later in the interview, Student 12 mentioned again about how much she and her friends talk about television:

> We talk about school and stuff, and like, 'Oh my gosh I can't believe we have a math test today, I didn't even study.' And sometimes we just play … And we talk a lot about TV. We talk about *The Simpsons*, because they are so funny—like the episodes.

Student 12's closets friends were some of the heaviest television viewers in the class— that bond they had helped them keep their relationship strong, and referencing television in their conversations together was something that often happened.

Student 5 said if she gave up television, she would still keep connected to the television shows by asking her friends what happened on the episodes. Her desire to be informed indicated that she would be willing to put forth effort to stay in touch with her favorite shows—they seemed to be that valuable to her. Student 5 said she liked the same shows that her friends liked. Even though she would be missing her favorite shows if she took the million dollars, Student 5 still would use television to facilitate and encourage conversation. She would have a context for the shows she was familiar with before she

took the money, however, when a new show came on that her friends would talk about, that might make the situation more difficult because she would be missing a reference point for those conversations.

During the in-depth interview, Student 2 was asked what she would talk about with her friends if they didn't have television to talk about, and she used a television example to describe the scenario:

We wouldn't talk about anything. We would just—have you seen *Arthur*? Well, they always lay in a circle with their heads touching; they're like, 'Let's noginnate.' And they stick their heads together. That's what we'd do. We'd say, 'What do you want to do?' 'I don't know, what do you want to do?' 'I don't know.' That's what we would do because we wouldn't know what to do or talk about or anything. Because everything would be boring.

In Student 2's mind, life would be incredibly dull without television—this student was the heaviest television user out of the nineteen students who kept the media use journals. She estimated that she watched 8.4 hours of television each day. With that much television watching each day, she obviously would have a big hole in her life if she gave it up. In describing her life without television, she used a television example to make her point. This indicated that television was something she had internalized—it was how she explained her life without television. She pictured a life without television as something boring; if she chose that situation it would leave a hole in her friendships. They wouldn't know what to talk about and wouldn't even know what activities to participate in together.

Television as something to do with friends

Throughout the data collection, students spoke or wrote about television as not only a conversation enhancer, but also as an activity they participated in with their friends. Student 15 didn't have a whole lot to say about television and friends, but he did say, "My friend, Scott, he loves to watch TV. The only time I really watch TV is when I'm over at his house." That simple statement shows that student's connection between their friendship and the television. Even though Student 15 didn't watch a lot of television on his own, he would if he was with his friend—to please him and help their relationship remain strong.

Student 5 explained how her friendships often revolved around media rituals. She said that on Saturdays she would watch cartoons in the mornings and then call her friends. "We usually play all day, and then if there's a new episode of TV coming on then we'll usually watch it. And I have a sleepover with them, and we watch scary movies," she explained. Student 5 said it was fun to watch scary movies with her friends—it was something they did at least twice a month. She also explained that her friends also talk about the latest episodes of television shows together—like Disney's *Even Stevens*. These media rituals she participated in were a way she bonded with her friends. There were reserved times when and even a certain genre of movies they liked watching together. Their media use played a huge role in the dynamic of their friendship.

Student 8 said she wouldn't give up television because it would affect her socially. She said, "If your friends wanted you to watch movies with them, then you'd have to say no and stay home all by yourself." To Student 8 giving up movies and television was associated with loneliness, and she perceived that it would be hard to have

grounds for a friendship in any other way—the media was such a determining factor in her friendships that they couldn't progress without them.

In her personal essay, Student 16 said she wanted to be an actress and that she was big television critic. She explained, "Me and my cousin, since we were little, we always watch thousands and thousands of movies over the weekend and stuff. And we just critique all the shows we see …we just like to do that. That's my favorite thing to do about TV." Later in the interview, Student 16 also mentioned that she talks about movies with her cousin a lot because she's closer to her cousin than she is with her other friends. "We talk about all her friends and stuff then we start talking about movies," she explained. "But with my other friends we just talk about friends and sports." To her, it seemed that talking about television was something she only did with her closest friends—maybe because talking about television was related to the fact that her dream was to be an actress.

Besides talking about television shows and episodes, the students also used television as an activity to participate in with friends. Watching television with friends was an option that was consistently available and free, which helped because these students were too young to earn money on their own. They were able to find programs that could be specifically tailored to their age and interests, at a time when they are in between childhood and adolescents. Instead of playing make-believe games when spending time with friends, they participated in a more mature world of make-believe, one created on television shows. Forming television-watching rituals with their friends was a way to establish social consistency, which is cherished at this time in their lives.

Those who didn't watch television with friends

Not all students used television as something to talk about or to participate in with their friends. Student 11 didn't have much to say on the topic; she was quiet during the interview. She said her friends liked *American Idol* and *Survivor*. She said her friends talked about those shows a lot, but Student 11 said she didn't mind it when they spoke about television shows she didn't know about.

One student said he would rather play with his friends than spend time watching television with them. During Student 19's interview, he was asked if he ever watched television with his friends. He responded, "Not really, because there is more stuff to do with your friends—like ride bikes." He believed that watching television was an individual hobby—and he reserved more active activities for the times he spent with his friends.

Student 14 said her friend watches a lot of television, but she was pretty comfortable with the fact that she didn't watch as much as her friend did:

Student 14: My friend, Marcy, she doesn't go to this school, but she watches tons of TV.

R: So do you guys watch the same TV shows?

14: She has cable, and I don't so…that's a difference.

R: Does she talk about shows that you don't watch sometimes?

14:Yeah.

R: What does she say about them?

14: She just says, 'Have you seen this movie?' And I say, 'No.' She talks about it…about the movie.

R: Does that make you feel left out at all?

14: No, not really. After she talks about it, it sounds like a good movie so I want to see it.

Student 14 was pretty secure with her relationship to television—she didn't seem too influenced by her friends viewing habits, although she did mention that sometimes the comments her friend made piqued her interest and gave her the desire to find out what her friend was talking about.

Student 17 was the big reader of the group—so she didn't spend a lot of time watching television or talking about it with her friends. Additionally, Student 17's parents didn't allow her to see movies rated PG-13 or R; she said her friends mostly talked about movies that were rated PG-13. Student 17 said she would probably watch PG-13 movies if her parents would let her, and she said she sometimes felt left out because she hasn't seen the things her friends have. This student's television limitations may have been the reason she read so much. Despite the reason, Student 17 didn't seem to be as involved with the members of her class and she didn't have the same bond with the other students. Her teacher said that Student 17 would often skip recess to read books and would try to read during class time; also when Student 17 got in trouble with her parents they would ground her from reading as a punishment.

When students didn't have the same television interests or habits, it affected their relationships. Students either had had to find another activity to participate in or they had to be left out of a conversation. Although not all students used television as something to do or talk about with their friends, the majority of students acknowledged that television played a role in their friendships. Television offers a bridge to friendship at a time when

the students are searching for meaningful relationships with their peers—it eases social

situations and gives a common bond to youth.

Youth need to learn about the new group they're being socialized into/ Television

offers portrayals of those situations

Television is often use by youth as a way to learn about things unknown to them.

It can take them to places and lives that are foreign to them. In this study, some of the

students recognized that television gave them information. This basic idea is illustrated

through a conversation that occurred during the first focus group, with the medium

television viewers. When Student 7 was answering the million-dollar question, he was

explaining there were other things to do besides television. A voice in the background,

interrupted and asked, "Yeah, how much stuff do you learn off that (television)?"

Immediately, in unison, three voices answered, "A lot!"

The students then discussed a little about what they learned from television—they

discussed the more obvious things they learned from public television and

science/learning stations. Some mentioned that they used television to learn about their

future careers. Student 3 said she enjoyed watching what she called educational shows—

like ones that can be found on Animal Planet, Discovery Channel, Home and Garden

Television, and The Learning Channel. She said:

> I learn a lot of stuff by these shows, like awhile ago I was watching *E-Vets*, it's an
>
> emergency animal hospital in Denver, Colorado, … I love animals; I'm even
>
> considering—I'm torn between being a vet or a singer—so watching *E-Vets* helps
>
> me. Before I could not watch animals being cut open, but now it's interesting to
>
> watch. I'm learning more about the animals and what to do for this and stuff.

Student 16 said that she also learned about her future career—being an actress—and how to be creative on television. In her personal interview, she explained:

If I didn't see TV, I wouldn't know if I wanted to be a movie star or something. … It helps me decided if I do want to be a movie star and the kind of role I want to play. And it does help my creativity. I learn how to do new things, cook new things, and I try new things that you see on creative shows, where they show you how to do it. I learned how to do all those. I don't think I'm a very creative person.

As the youth face this socialization process, they begin to think about their future and about how they want their adult life to formulate. As they become interested in a career, they may have opportunities to explore and learn more about their future profession through watching certain television programs. While not all careers are portrayed on television, there are numerous depictions of general areas on television that the youth can view and internalize. Certain television programs were used and evaluated by the students to help them decide what they wanted to do with their lives and careers.

But not all students turned to television to learn about careers—others said they watched to learn how to have fun. In his personal interview, Student 6 explained that he thought television was a good invention and that he couldn't live without it. The conversation continued:

R: Why couldn't you live without TV?

Student 6: I learn things on it.

R: Like what?

6: Like sometimes I watch the Discovery Channel—usually never, but I watch *Home Improvement*; I learn jokes on that.

R: What do you learn from *DragonBall Z*?

6: How to play. How to have fun.

For Student 6, television was a way to learn about more enjoyable things. He mentioned that he learned jokes from watching *Home Improvement*. Student 5 also mentioned that she would recycle jokes that she had heard first on television. Because of the changes and developments going on in these sixth-graders lives, they can be self-conscious about how they present themselves. Through modeling jokes they've observed on television, they are lessening the risk associated of telling a joke and heightening their chance as appearing to look good in front of others. The students reason that if a joke or comment was funny on television their friends will also interpret it as being funny.

Though there was overt information the youth gained from watching television, some students were also aware of the other more covert lessons portrayed on television. In one conversation a student was talking about characters' choices:

R: So why do you think they show characters on TV making bad choices?

Student 13: 'Cause they sometimes do that to teach you if you're ever in those situations, not to make those bad choices.

More specifically, Student 1 talked about how television taught her how to deal with social situations. She explained, "That (*Saved by the Bell*) is a cool show because it shows how kids actually take care of their problems with their other friends, and I can actually use that on my friends sometimes and that works."

Student 3, who said she really enjoyed educational shows, also spoke about her favorite non-educational show, *Lizzy McGuire*. The student said it was fun to watch Lizzy's experiences with her friends. She continued, "If she does something really dumb then I can learn not to do that. But if she does something good, then if I'm in that situation, then I can do that good thing. Because I'm going through situations that Hilary Duff, the star of *Lizzy*, is portraying Lizzy doing." Student 3 then described a time when she could relate to Lizzy, when she was in a fight with her friends.

The added pressure these students were feeling to form friendships and gain group acceptance also brought an interest in learning about how to handle these important social situations. They saw portrayals of how characters got into conflicts with their friends and were able to glean information about how to handle those types of situations when or if they arise in the students' own lives.

The students not only learned about how to deal with social situations, but they also learned about social roles from television. Student 12 explained during her personal interview that she was a cheerleader and that her mom was one also. When she was asked if her mom got her interested in cheerleading, she said no, it was television portrayals that got her interested.

> Since I was really little, there were shows like *Lizzy McGuire* … there is this girl
> Kate, and she is the head cheerleader and stuff. She is just so popular. There is
> [sic] always these shows on TV. There is like cheerleading competitions on TV.
> And I just thought it was so fun; I thought that was all the cool people, that's what
> they did.

Student 12's experiences with popularity and cheerleading were built upon what she'd learned from television and was trying to mimic in her own life. She talked about popularity a lot, and it was clearly something important to her. Student 12 saw the rewards of being a cheerleader from those portrayals of cheerleaders on television. Through her television viewing, she came to the conclusion that a being a cheerleader was something she wanted. The popularity benefit was something that was especially appealing about it. Those portrayals caused her to believe that if she wanted to be considered cool, then she would need to be a cheerleader.

The students recognized that there were shows available that were obviously teaching the viewers. But some also mentioned during the research that they learned about social subjects through television—popularity, problem-solving with friends, and how to play.

Learning from stupidity

One of the more popular television shows that came up in the media journals and in the interviews was *Spongebob Squarepants*. The students' favorite character was Patrick, the stupid sidekick of Spongebob. The students had some interesting thoughts on stupidity and Patrick's character.

Student 7 was a huge fan of the show—in fact in his personal essay he wrote that his friends would laugh at him if he hadn't seen the last *Spongebob* episode. In the interview, Student 7 said he liked to talk with his friends about how dumb the characters on the show were.

R: Has anything ever happened to you when you're reminded of the show?

Student 7: Well, my brother, is just not bright sometimes in a lot of situations.

R: Is he older than you?

7: Yeah, he's 13, turning 14 soon.

R: So sometimes he does something stupid and you're like …

7: "Hey that's what Patrick does."

R: Isn't he the goofy one?

7: Yeah, he's the stupid one.

R: Do you think you're like a character on *Spongebob*?

7: No.

A little later in the interview, Student 7 was talking about why he liked the *Drew Carey Show*.

Student 7: You know that tall guy?

R: Yeah, Ryan Stiles.

7: Yeah, he's my favorite—he's so funny.

R: Why do you like him the best?

7: Because all he really does is, I don't know, he's just like really dumb. He's like the Patrick of the *Drew Carey Show*.

R: You like characters like that?

7: Yeah.

Even later in the interview Student 7 was talking about a funny student in his class who always quotes movies, he said: "He's like Patrick."

Student 2 also liked watching stupid characters. While interviewing Student 2, she talked about *The Simpsons*, her favorite show. When asked why it was her favorite, she replied, "Because Homer's so stupid." She said she enjoyed watching him do stupid

things. Later in the interview, student two talked about how she watched television in her room—she would sit in a corner of her room and curl up in her blankets. She explained, "I have this little beanbag chair I sit in, and my thoughts are … I don't know, all my thoughts are all on the shows. I'll think of how stupid the people are when they don't do something that I think they should do. That makes me mad."

During the personal interview with Student 5, she talked about watching television shows with her friends and planning their get-togethers around television shows.

R: Is it fun to watch (TV) together?

Student 5: Yeah, because we can be, 'Oh my gosh, why'd he do that? He's so stupid. Why'd he do that?'

R: Do you usually agree? Do you always think a character is stupid?

5: Yeah (name of friend) is like, 'Man, why did she tell him that the teacher changed the test or something?' I'm like, 'Well, maybe they're good friends' or something like that. I forgot her name, they guy she told about the test, she's kind of psycho. But hey, it's TV, not me.

Student 18 also said that her favorite character on television was Patrick because he was funny. The students loved to see the television shows—especially *Spongebob Squarepants*—where there was a not-so-bright character. It seemed that watching a stupid character made the students feel better about themselves, or perhaps they were just entertained by seeing someone doing dumb things. The students recognized that what certain characters did was dumb, and they learned what not to do as a result. While in this self-conscious stage, the students viewed stupid characters because watching them made

them feel better about themselves; they also learned how to identify and interpret stupid situations.

Youth who are at this stage in life are naturally curious about how their life is going to change as it unfolds in upcoming years, and television is a resource they can use to learn more about life as an adolescent and young adult. Besides offering a glimpse into an unknown experience, television offers youth potential to develop parasocial relationships and social capital—fulfilling their heightened need for friendship at this time in their lives. Because television offers these lucrative effects to youth, it consequently becomes very valuable to them.

Value to Students

As outlined in this chapter, television was valuable to most of the youth because it gave them things needed as they began the adolescent socialization process. At the end of this data collection (the last question of the final phase of the data collection, the focus group), the students gave their final answer to the million-dollar question. Ten out of eighteen students said they would rather keep the television instead of the money.

Because television offer the things pre-adolescents are looking for—parasocial relationships, social capital, and portrayals of the world they are being socialized into and curious about—television becomes extremely valuable to them. This section will look at students' thoughts about their perceptions/attachment to television.

Student 6 related television's value in monetary terms he also mentioned that he couldn't live without it. Right off in the interview, he told the researcher that it would take a lot of money for him to give up television.

R: I wanted to talk about your essay—whether not you'd give up TV for a million dollars. You said no, you'd miss all your favorite shows. You said you'd might for, how much is that, 150 million dollars? Would you tell me a little more why you'd do that?

Student 6: 'Cause I just like TV; I can't live without it.

This student later said that it might take more than 150 million dollars for him to give up television. When asked why it was so valuable to him, he reiterated, "I don't know, because it's a good invention. I couldn't live without it."

Student 7 also said it would take more than a million dollars for him to give up television—he came to the conclusion that two million would be enough for him to give it up. Student 9 said he wouldn't give it up for "nine trillion dollars," but he did say he would give it up only if he could rule the world. Student 6 wrote in his personal essay that he would give up television for a money machine—and maybe for $150,000,000,000,000. Student 8 wrote in her personal essay that she wouldn't give it up for one trillion dollars. She wrote, "I like TV to [sic] much to not have it for the rest of my life. I couldn't live without TV because I just like it … It would also be impossible to go somewhere without seeing a TV."

Some of these students were adamant about not forgoing watching television. Although they may not have a firm grasp on how much money a million dollars actually was, they were still listing off exorbitant amounts of money they would have to receive to give up television. Television was something they highly valued.

Student 12 plainly stated at the beginning of her personal interview:

Student 12: I could never live without TV; it's like my favorite thing.

R: Why is it your favorite thing?

12: Because you can just sit there and watch it and it entertains you. If there is a good show on you can just sit down and watch it.

In the interview with Student 1, she was asked what she would do if she couldn't watch television. Student 1 replied, "I'd kill myself. Commit suicide." When probed about that comment, she said:

Because TV is my life. That's all me and my mom watch is TV, and then my homework and then TV again. And then she says, 'What do you want to do for your free time? When your homework is half way done then you can do something for an hour, then you have to go straight back to your homework.' And I'm like, 'TV!' And she's like, 'Ok, you can watch TV for an hour, and then you can go back.' And it's finally on my favorite show, and then I only have a half hour left, but it's an hour long. So I'm sitting there, begging, so she's like, 'Alright, do it in front of the TV, as long as you get it done on every commercial.' And I'm like, "'Ok, I will.' And she's like, 'Ok.'

Perhaps Student 1 was just being dramatic when she said that she would kill herself if she couldn't watch television anymore; however, it was such an automatic response. She said she felt like television was her life—although she was in the medium viewer category of her class, watching an average of 1.5 hours a day. Student 1 also mentioned that television helped her have more friends. By taking away her television, she would loose her friends—a life that she pictured as worthless.

Other students' feelings toward television weren't so drastic as Student 1's were, but they still enjoyed watching television. When the researcher began going through Student 2's media journal with her, the student said, as she pointed to one entry:

Student 2: That was the best day!

R: Why was that the best day?

2: Because I got to watch a lot of TV… everything was on. I was like, 'After this show, I'm going to be done. Oh wait, never mind, another show is on.' I like that show too [pointing to media journal]. *That 70s Show.*

Student 2 evaluated her day in relation to how much television she had consumed; watching her favorite shows made her happy. Student 2, who was the heaviest television viewer in the class, estimated she watched 8.4 hours of television. If she really believed that television could make her happy, then she was putting forth the effort to consume as much happiness as possible.

Some students' affinity toward television was manifest in the particular television rituals they participated in. Though some of the students participated in media rituals with their friends, others had personal television rituals. Student 5, who had a television in her room, explained her morning routine to the researcher:

R: What time do you get up about?

Student 5: 7:15, somewhere around there.

R: And you just lay in bed and watch TV for awhile, and you start getting ready when?

5: 7:30, when my show's over.

R: And you leave your TV on though, right?

5: Yeah, cause I'm usually in the bathroom most of the time doing my hair and stuff, and my room's right by my bathroom. So I keep the door open, and it reflects through the mirror, and I can see it. So I watch TV while I'm doing my hair. It's great.

R: Is the TV on while you're eating breakfast?

5: Yeah, my mom doesn't like it on, but I tell her 'No, it's a new episode, I have to watch it.' She's always, 'There can't be a new episode on everyday'—it's worth a try.

R: Is there a new episode everyday?

5: Well, sometimes. Actually there's only been one time when there's been a new episode.

R: Only once in the last few months?

5:Yeah. But I just like watching TV, and so my mom's like, 'You can't watch it everyday.' 'But mom, it's a new episode.' I just have to; it's my morning schedule.

Student 12 also had television rituals she participated in, and she gave a detailed analysis of her daily television use:

Student 12: You get up every morning and then you watch TV. That's like the first thing you do. You get up and come downstairs and just watch TV for like…then you get cereal and you bring it on the couch and you get right by the couch while you are watching TV. Then you eat it. And usually there are music videos like on MTV. After that you've got to get ready. My mom usually brings the clothes in, and we get dressed in front of the TV.

R: Who's we?

12: My brother and my sister.

R: So all three of you are getting ready in front of the TV?

12: Yeah. We're watching it too. That's when the *Bernstein Bears* come on. Because we have to turn it off after *Arthur* is over, but we usually don't. We watch the *Bernstein Bears*. I've seen so many of those. And then after you are done getting ready you go do your hair, and then put your shoes on, then you go to school. And when you go to school you usually can't watch TV there, because they don't let you. At recess we talk about TV and stuff. Like at lunch we always sing songs from the themes. And then the lunch lady gets mad at us. We always sing *Spongebob Squarepants* theme song and everyone gets mad at us. Like the whole sixth grade just sitting there singing it. Then after that you come home and you are eating it in front of the TV. And then you do your homework. You can do your homework in front of the TV sometimes if it's not really, really hard. But usually I have to come away from the TV to do my math. Because it's really hard.

R: What about when you are homework is done?

12: Then you watch more TV. Or sometimes you can call people and stuff, and you can talk to them and they can call you. But usually after I'm done I go watch TV. Right when I get home from school *Even Stevens* and *Lizzy McGuire* and *That's So Raven*…those are the one's that I like. Then after that it's Nick at Night and stuff after I'm done with my homework.

R: You like watching Nick at Night?

12: Yeah. I like oldies, I don't know why. *The Cosby Show*, *Three's Company*

too. I love those little oldies shows.

Through these detailed and rigorous television-viewing habits, the students showed that

television was an important and integral part of their lives. They learn to depend on it to

fulfill their needs, and it becomes valuable to them. If it weren't important to them, they

wouldn't spend as much time with it or go to such great lengths to watch it. This shows

the value watching television was to them personally, especially if they were the ones

who were holding themselves to the schedule—not their friends.

Student 10 had a practical reason for wanting to keep the television: He said he

couldn't live without television because he couldn't find out what was happening in the

news and what the weather was going to be. When Student 10 was asked about if he

could get the information from the newspaper, he still said he wouldn't give it up because

he liked the visual aspect of the weather and news events. He said it was important for

him to see the news.

Student 13's loyalty to television wasn't terribly deep, but he still said he

wouldn't give it up because he wanted to have it around in case he was bored or just felt

like watching television. Student 18 wrote in her personal essay that it would be very

hard for her to give up television permanently because she can even go thirty minutes

without it. "I would go crazy … I would be very board" [sic].

These practical needs the students felt the television fulfilled made it valuable to

them. These students are at time in their lives where they desire to participate in things

they are too young for, such as being involved with school athletics (these students were

attending an elementary school, not a middle school) or other extracurricular activities.

These students could have also felt they were too old to play certain games with their friends. Because they were at this crossroad, television was a way they could combat their boredom. The heaviest television viewers were also less inclined to give up television—five out of the six students in the focus group with the heaviest viewers said they would keep the television instead of the money. The sixth student said the only reason he would take the money was because the economy was bad. The more the students were involved with the television, the more dependant and valuable it became to them.

Family Influences

Familial influences have lasting effects on children (MacBeth, 1996). Throughout the interviews, the students talked about their family members in relation to their media use. Some students knew their parents discouraged a lot of television use, but were still attached to it. Student 7 said: "My mom says, 'You're wasting your life,' but I don't really care."

Additionally, in one of the focus groups, Student 14 was asked to give her answer on whether she would choose the million dollars or the television in the final phase of the data collection. She replied, "Don't let my mom hear this, because … I would sort of keep the TV." These students were aware of their parents' feelings about television use, yet it was something the students wanted, and they were willing to go against what their parents instructed them to do, because of their reliance on and high regard for it.

Some students clashed with their parents when it came to matters related to watching television. But they were willing to fight to watch what they wanted and, at

times, willing to disobey their parents' rules or lie to them. Student 3 said her parents

didn't like her to watch television shows where parents were portrayed negatively.

> Student 3: I can't watch *Even Stevens* or *Sister, Sister* or *Fairly Oddparents*
>
> because it shows the parents as idiots, it doesn't have any family respect or
>
> family—my parents don't like those shows.
>
> R: So it's your parents who won't let you watch them. … Why?
>
> 3: One thing, they're just dumb. They have no family love. The parents often
>
> fight, and they call each other fools and stuff like that. They act like fools and act
>
> like idiots.

However, Student 3 admitted to watching those shows when she visited her cousin's

house because she said she gets hooked before she realizes that it's a show she's not

allowed to watch.

> Other students had a wider exposure to television shows and movies, but they still

had parents who were concerned with what their children watch. Student 16 said she

loved television, but she felt that her viewing was limited.

> Student 16: I don't get to watch it (television) a lot because I have a really, really,
>
> really, busy life. But when I do watch it, my mom gets mad. I really like TV.
>
> R: Does she want you doing other things?
>
> 16: Yeah, like homework.

Student 5 said her mom doesn't like the television on when the student is eating

breakfast before school. "But I tell her, 'No, it's a new episode; I have to watch it. She's

always, 'There can't be a new episode everyday.'" Student 5 admitted that there are only

new episodes "sometimes" but she just likes watching the television as she gets ready in the morning, despite her mother's objection.

Though some parents had set guidelines and made them known to their children, some of the students still went ahead and watched what they wanted to. Either the parents didn't enforce their guidelines well or the students were so attached and viewed the television as something so important that they went against what their parents' rules. As outlined in this chapter, the television fulfills certain needs the pre-adolescents are looking for.

Imitation

Some of the children shared situations when they imitated incidences they saw on television. Bandura (1994) wrote that people model others behavior when they perceive that it will give them some reward. As mentioned earlier, television offers portrayals of the world they are being socialized into. As a result of consuming these representations, children pick up situations they can model in their own life—either when a similar situation enters their life or through creating that situation themselves. Television additionally becomes valuable to them as they depend on it for situations to model.

Student 14 related an experience when she copied something she saw on the television show *Fear Factor*:

I watched one about … it was one where they had a rotten egg yoke, or whatever, and I ate it and it was like a few months old but theirs is [sic] like a hundred years old. It was pretty gross, and I got sick. They didn't get sick.

In focus group two the students listed a few things they had imitated. Student 2 said she went toilet papering after she saw an episode of *Even Stevens* where the

characters did that. She also said she would watch the cooking channel (Food Network) and want to cook something. She mentioned that her friends had imitated crazy stunts from the MTV show *Jackass*. She said, "(We) were skateboarding down the hill because we saw it on there, But one time me and this girl … were like laying on the skateboard on our stomachs, and we had these little bowling pins and we'd run into them .. like on the show."

Student 13 said he would copy the games and experiences that were show on the public television show, *Zoom*. Student 16 said she once tried to drive a car when she was eight-years-old because she saw it on television, but she ran the car into a garbage can. A couple of students also mentioned they were interested in visiting places they saw on television.

In addition to learning about social situations they could apply in their lives, the students also found activities to imitate. They were willing to try new things they had observed on television because they perceived that they would also reap similar rewards—either admiration, entertainment, or enjoyment. Television was valuable to these students because they used it to find activities to model that could help them experience the world in new ways.

Students Who Wanted Both

Some students couldn't part with television, even though the money was enticing. There were also students who could not grasp the concept of giving up television permanently. They realized they had to choose one or the other, but they still wanted to take the money and go buy a television—even though the question stated they would have to permanently give up watching television. Student 4 wrote in his initial essay: "I

would take the mony [sic] and invest some then take the other half and hide out in Canada and by [sic] a big screen."

However, in the personal interview, Student 4 said he was just joking and that he would even sell his television right then because he didn't watch it that much. The student may have changed his mind after writing the essay or maybe felt some pressure to change his answer—or he simply could have not taken the essay seriously. Throughout the interviews, other students shared similar (and sincere) thoughts on how they would like to have both the million dollars and the television.

> R: You wrote on your essay that you would give up TV for a million dollars
>
> Student 1: And then I would go into the forest, buy myself a big TV and then put it in a cabin in the forest.

After the students would say something like that, the researcher would have to explain that there was no way getting around the rules; if they took the money, there was no way they could ever watch television again. They were asked to assume that there was some device or system that would ensure that they could never watch television again.

Some students described how they would like to have both the television and the million dollars.

> R: You said in this essay that you wouldn't give up TV because you could earn a million dollars.
>
> Student 13: Yeah. It's becoming more and more common to earn more money. So I figure that I might as well keep something that I like, and I could just earn a million dollars another way.

R: What if you were really poor and you were just having a really hard time; would you give up TV for a million dollars?

13: I don't know; I might because then I could help my family. So yeah, I probably would if it was hard to make money. But if I'm making a good income I'd still like to watch TV.

Six students in the heavy viewing and medium viewing focus groups (Students 1, 7, 14, 2, 9, and 18) said they would take the money and then go buy a television, even though ultimately that answer wasn't an option. One student said she would move to Africa to live in an underground lair, another said she would take the money, watch television, and wouldn't give the money back. Even though the researcher explained multiple times that wasn't an option, some students still said that's what they would do. Student 14 said she would marry multi-billionaire Bill Gates, so she could keep the television. When pressed for a more realistic answer, student fourteen said she would keep the television and earn her own money. The students seemed to have a hard time grasping the idea of never watching television again—they wanted to somehow be able to take the money and still have the television.

The comments indicate that television was deeply valued to them. The two options were both appealing; all but five students switched their answer to the million-dollar question throughout the data collection. Four of those five students said all along that they would keep the television instead of taking the million dollars. Those four students had a firm dedication to television. It was a hard question for the students to answer—it was hard for them to imagine parting with something that had become so valuable to them. As a result of going through the data collection—talking about either

life without television or a life with a million dollars—in the end, the majority of the students decided they would keep their television. Ten out of the eighteen students felt television was worth for than one million dollars.

Conclusion

Abraham Maslow (1968) categorized the basic needs humans have in order to reach self-actualization; first physical needs, followed by safety needs, then social, and self-esteem. This research has focused on some of the social uses youth have for watching television. It looked at the social effects of using mass communication in interpersonal communication and also how youth use television to learn about the world they are being socialized into. Maslow's categories of needs build upon one another, and in his organization, social needs precede self-esteem needs. If youth must have their social needs met in order to meet their self-esteem needs, then watching television may be a way the youth indirectly help self-esteem needs at a time when their self-concept is changing and fragile.

By keeping youth up on current events and pop culture, television is a broad bonding agent. The more youth are involved with the media, the more they can become dependent on it for entertainment and information. As this research has suggested, pre-adolescents can use television to enhance their relationships with their peers and can also use television to learn about the new situations they are encountering as they are becoming socialized into the young adult world. Youth also have the opportunity to form parasocial relationships with television characters and celebrities through watching television. These situations can all be the result of youth turning to television to unconsciously satisfy needs.

Television is a common interest that people can share, but there certainly isn't an equation to guarantee that watching television equals social satisfaction. But as Student 7 described when asked if he preferred to be friends with those who had similar television tastes—"it just helps."

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

For this research project, nineteen sixth-grade students responded to the question, "Would you give up television for one million dollars?" The previous chapter discussed the research findings and grounded theory extracted from data collected in multiple settings—from personal essays, media journals, in-depth interviews, and focus groups. This chapter will summarize the research collection, discuss the limitations, and suggest future research.

Research Summary

In the previous decades, scholars have researched media effects and specifically looked at how the media influences children. Most of the studies have looked at effects—such as obesity and violence—that can result from watching television. This research examined pre-adolescents' television use through exploring the social effects television had on children. Because this study is not a replication, the design had to be emergent and collected qualitatively. To ensure valid research, the researcher used multiple methods of data collection. First, the students wrote a short, personal essay responding to the million-dollar question. Next the sixth grade class kept media journals for five days, so the researcher could get a feel for what shows the students watched and how long they watched. When the students were later divided into focus groups, they were grouped together by how much television they watched, according to their media journals.

After the students kept their media journals, the researcher met with them personally to discuss what they wrote. The researcher used the essays to autodrive the conversation. These in-depth interviews were recorded and transcribed. The last phase of the methodology was the focus group, which were also recorded and transcribed. Three focus groups were held (with the heavy, medium, and light viewers), consisting of six students each.

Three themes emerged from the data collection that displayed the youths' attachment to television. The three main reasons justifying television's value to them were: it offers them potential to develop one-way relationships with television characters and celebrities; it gives them something to do and to talk about with their friends; and it shows them portrayals of the adolescent and adult world they are being socialized into. Because television offers pre-adolescents these lucrative representations, it in turn becomes valuable to them—worth more than one million dollars in the eyes of the majority of students interviewed.

Television is also valuable because it offers youth things they are curious about and interested in—namely friendships and information. In the end of the focus group, which was the last phase of data collection, the students were asked to give their final answer to the million-dollar question. Ten out of the eighteen students who participated in the focus groups said they would give up television for one million dollars.

Youth need friendship/Television offers potential to develop parasocial relationships

At this time in pre-adolescents' lives, they develop strong desires to have friendships. To fulfill this need to form friendships, some turn to the television and develop one-way relationships, parasocial relationships. This was evident in some of the

comments the students made about friendship voids in their lives and their fantasies about forming relationships with celebrities.

In the second focus group with the heavy television viewers, there were three girls who were friends; as they were sharing their television experiences, they dominated the discussion during the focus group because of their closeness and extensive television use. Two of the girls talked about their crushes on actor Orlando Bloom, who played Legolas in the *Lord of the Ring* movies. These students would actually fight with their friends and siblings for the right to say she was dating a celebrity or character she saw on television. They each were vying for the right to say that Orlando Bloom was her boyfriend. Even though they'll most likely never encounter these people, from what they've seen of them on television they are attracted to them and feel compelled to date them.

Besides having fantasies about celebrities, the students also turned to television when their friends were absent. Student 9 said when he was younger he didn't watch as much television as he does now; he said he liked to play outside more. He said he began watching television and movies more often because his friends couldn't play with him as much any more. By developing relationships with television characters, Student 9 was able to fill a void in his life.

These comments illustrate the way youth can perceive characters and celebrities as the recipients of a parasocial relationship. While these relationships are one-way, the person giving the adoration does receive the feeling of having a friend and that helps fulfill their need for friendship.

Youth need intimacy/Television is an activity they can do with and talk about with

friends

While pre-adolescents need friendship, they also need reciprocating relationships and feelings of intimacy. At this stage in their development, bonding with people is especially meaningful to them. They use television as a way to enhance social situations, because it is something that they have in common, this is known as social capital. Television is an easy conversation starter, and it's an activity they can participate in and enjoy together.

One student openly admitted that watching television strengthened her relationships with her peers. Student 1 said she hadn't always watched a lot of television and explained that when she started watching more television she had more friends. Other students expressed the idea that watching television helps them keep their friendships strong. Student 7 wrote in his personal essay that he and his friends were the biggest fans of *Spongebob Squarepants*. If he didn't have television, he wrote, "All my friends would say, 'Yo, have you seen the latest episode of *Spongebob*? Ha ha ha. No???? Dude, you're messed up.'" He said that happened once and he was laughed at—he clarified that he wasn't really being ridiculed, but his friends seemed more shocked that he missed an episode because he was such a loyal fan.

Not only was television something that students would talk about with each other, but it also was an activity that they would participate in together. Several students mentioned that they would watch shows or movies with their friends. Student 16 said she was a big television critic. She explained, "Me and my cousin, since we were little, we always watch thousands and thousands of movies over the weekend and stuff. And we

just critique all the shows we see …we just like to do that. That's my favorite thing to do about TV." Later in the interview, Student 16 also mentioned that she talks about movies with her cousin a lot because she's closer to her cousin than she is with her other friends. Talking about television was something she only did with her cousin—the person who Student 16 shared her dreams of being an actress with.

Watching television is a way to increase affiliation with friends. It is a simple way to entertain friends when spending time together; it also can provide a common interest for youth by giving students topics to talk about with their friends.

Youth need to learn about the new group they're being socialized into/Television offers portrayals of those situations

The students interviewed were in a transitory position in their lives. As they are beginning socialization development, they are curious about the new events they'll have in their lives. Over the next few years, they begin thinking more seriously about occupations, education, and relationships, and they want to learn about those situations so they aren't so foreign to them when encountered. Often, youth turn to television to watch, learn, and model what is portrayed on television as they mature.

A few students mentioned that they watched television to learn about their future careers. Student 3 said she enjoyed watching what she called educational shows—like ones that can be found on Animal Planet, Discovery Channel, and The Learning Channel. She said she was interested in becoming a veterinarian and she watched a show about vets to learn about what it would be like to be one. Student 16 said that she also learned about a possible career—being an actress—through television. In her personal interview, she explained, "If I didn't see TV, I wouldn't know if I wanted to be a movie star or

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something. … It helps me decided if I do want to be a movie star and the kind of role I want to play."

Another student spoke about how she understood the connection between extra-curricular activities and popularity from television. Student 12 explained that she was a cheerleader and her mom was one also. She said television got her interested in becoming a cheerleader—not her mom. Student 12's beliefs about popularity and cheerleading were founded in what she'd learned from television and wanted to experience. Being popular was something she valued and she observed the popular characters on television were cheerleaders.

These students turned to television to learn about roles they were interested in fulfilling. Through these portrayals and collected information, they learned about what's in store for them in the future and what they needed to do become like those they saw on television.

Value to pre-adolescents

Because television offer things pre-adolescents are looking for—parasocial relationships, something to do and talk about with friends, and portrayals of the world they are being socialized into and curious about—television becomes extremely valuable to them. This section will look at students' thoughts about their perceptions/attachment to television.

A few students tried to put a price tag on television—these turned out to be a very large price tag; much more than the hypothetical million presented by the researcher. Student 6 wrote in his personal essay that he would give up television for a money machine—and maybe for $150,000,000,000,000. Student eight wrote in her personal

essay that she wouldn't give it up for one trillion dollars. One student didn't put a price tag on television, but she flat out said that without television she would kill herself. In the interview with Student 1, she was asked what she would do if she couldn't watch television. Student 1 replied, "I'd kill myself. Commit suicide."

Television satisfies multiple, important needs the pre-adolescents are experiencing in their lives. It helps them as they are socialized into new settings in an unfamiliar world. The five students who watched television the most were said they would keep the television over the million dollars—their heavy dependence made it more valuable to them.

Conjecture

Television can be a social lubricant youth use to encourage and strengthen their relationships. Television is definitely not the only way youth can form friendships, and it's not suggested that they form friendships solely based on similar television interests. However, it can help, and during this study it was evident that most students recognized how to use television to aid their social needs. Most research points at the negative consequences television can potentially offer. Despite all the warnings, television can be an important component in the making of and keeping friendships. It can be a factor in removing some apprehension from these pre-adolescents.

The students in this study attended a school where they wore uniforms. Instead of forming friendships based on how each other looked, the students may have been drawn to others based on similar media interests. The girls who were more popular (based on the researcher's and teacher's observations) were the heavier television viewers in the class. With the aid of television, the more popular students were able to fill their social needs

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and secure their status among classmates. Alternately, Student 17 read a lot and her parents limited her television and media use strictly in comparison to her classmates. During data collection, the researcher noticed how quiet Student 17 was—she also was often excluded and ridiculed.

Those who wouldn't give television up may have felt unable to satisfy their developmental needs in other ways. Television makes fulfilling these needs more convenient. Television becomes a functional substitute—the pre-adolescents have to turn to television because most people aren't in an environment where they're exposed to anything else. Because of this, television becomes their reality and gains value. The youth may consider television more satisfying, not only because it entertains them but also because it socializes them. It is easily accessible and can show them different situations and roles they can learn from, observe, and model. It is a broad socializing agent that offers plenty of characters, personalities, and niches for a variety of audience members.

Yet there's a balance needed. On one side, parents should allow their children to watch television because it gives youth opportunities to use it to help their relationships. The students who participated in this project are at an age where forming relationships is important, and being up-to-date on the latest television shows helps ease the pressures of making friends and holding conversations with peers. On the other side, there are a lot of unnecessary violent, sexual, and extreme portrayals on television that a parent understandably would want his or her child to avoid. Parents who have no television restrictions for their children will experience other challenges. Television addiction is also a real concern; those who watch a lot of television can exhibit symptoms similar to substance dependence, including withdrawals (Kubey & Csikszentmihalyi, 2004) Part of

this ironic contradiction is the fact that while forming interpersonal relationships is important, youth also need to learn how to be individuals. If they become too dependent on both television and peers as roles models for identity role development, they are likely to face serious problems as they enter the adult world.

Additionally, parents shouldn't regard television as an answer to solve their child's popularity problem. For youth, knowing about television shows is simply valuable information that will be guaranteed discussion at recess or in the lunch line at school. This mindset could have been cultivated as far back as kindergarten. *Sesame Street* teaches children numbers and the alphabet—giving them an advantage at school. This approach continues as they progress through their education—but later on television gives them social advantages, instead of purely educational benefits.

Society has become a media-saturated environment. It would be hard to shield children from all media, and trying to do that may only pique a youth's curiosity even more. It's essential that parents and teachers teach youth about television and how it can skew reality and create false wants (see Recommendations section). But it is also important for parents to recognize how their children perceive and use television. If the parents can understand why the youth are watching television, then parents can set more appropriate guidelines for their children's television use.

Limitations

There are some limitations in this study that might have influenced the research. There are inherent problems with qualitative methodology as outlined in Chapter Three. For instance, when student eleven was interviewed she seemed really distracted and quiet throughout the conversation. After the researcher ended the official questions, the student

asked the researcher if she had dated one of her relatives. During the interview the student was probably trying to figure out if she knew the researcher instead of focusing on the questions about her media use. In another setting, three girls in the second focus group were best friends and dominated most of the discussion in that particular focus group—they had great insights, but didn't let the others talk much. The moderator tried to let everyone have an opportunity, but those three girls definitely said the most. That's one drawback of holding a focus group; however, the research design of this study also allowed the students to express their opinion in an in-depth interview with the researcher and in the personal essay.

The students also might not have really understood how much a million dollars was worth. Because of their age the students interviewed really didn't have a grasp on how expensive life can cost. They most likely haven't had personal experiences with major debt or costly purchases. Since one million dollars is such an abstract concept to them, it may have been easier for them to brush it off and say they would rather keep the television.

Another limitation came from the students' self-reports of their media use. Because they estimated their own use the morning after, there could have been problems remembering every show they watched. Miscalculations also may have thrown off the students' estimated use. Students could have also felt like they needed to downplay how much they watched television, or they could have simply been lazy and not wanted to record every television show they watched the previous day.

One other limitation of this study is that the million-dollar question could be interpreted differently. The question's ambiguity may have created different contexts for

the students. Some students wanted more details about the million-dollar question—if they gave up television, would have to give up other forms of visual media and entertainment also? Here's one exchange that illustrates how the breadth of the question affected one student's answer:

R: I wanted to talk about the essay you wrote. You said you would give up TV for a half a million dollars. Why?

Student 19: Because there is [sic] not that many great TV shows. But I like video games.

R: If you didn't have TV then it would be hard to play video games.

19: Yeah.

R: What if you couldn't play video games?

19: Then no, I wouldn't (take the half million dollars).

R: How about for a million dollars?

19: I don't know, probably not still.

R: So you're not into TV much, but you really like video games.

19: Yeah.

One final limitation is that the students' perceptions of reality on television weren't measured scientifically. If a student believed that television portrayals accurately reflected real life, then maybe he/she would have been more likely to keep television instead of the million dollars, and he/she would have used television to learn about life as an adolescent and/or adult.

During the data collection, the researcher was able to talk with the students a little bit about how real they thought television was. During the focus groups, the students

talked about what they perceived as "real" on television. Students in focus group one said they thought shows like *Cops*, *20/20*, and the news were real. Student 17 said that he didn't think anything besides news shows were real. He said, "Like wrestling and stuff, I thought that was real for awhile and my mom said, 'No, it looks real, but it's really fake.'" The students in focus group two said they though television was real, except for Student 13. He said he thought that things on television were "sometimes real." He explained, "Some things are totally fake because you can tell because when they're acting and they pretend to hit someone. That's just fake; so sometimes it's real and others is just fake."

In the third focus group, a lot of the students thought that shows besides sitcoms were real. Student 8 said, "I think that especially the shows where they have, like at the end of shows, the out takes, those ones aren't real, because they have a script for them, that's how they mess up." Student 14, who thought about 55-60 percent of sitcom shows were real, said, "*Home Improvement*, I really like that show; it's funny. It's sort of real, you know, but they do exaggerate stuff." By gauging the students' perceptions of reality on television, the researcher could have interpreted the data collected differently in terms of the students' value.

Recommendations

The last question in the final phase of the data collection allowed the students to answer the million-dollar question one more time. At that point during the data collection, Student 5 said she would keep the television. She continued:

> But I just love it so much. I couldn't live without a day of TV. My dad one week
> was like, 'If you don't watch TV the whole week, I'll give you $70.' I'm like,

'Ok, ok, I'll do it, I'll do it.' So the next day I get up, and he's asleep. I go in the other room, and I start watching TV. It was *Littlebear*, and then he (the dad) comes in and was like, 'You can't even stand a whole hour.'

Her quote illustrates the heavy dependence some youth have on television. For youth to have a healthy perspective on television, parents should be involved in monitoring their children's television use. Parents decide how much they let their children watch, what the children and going to watch, and how they are going to enforce those rules. If parents blatantly ban a certain shows, types of shows, or television all together, it may only attract a child to what is being banned; a situation like this surfaced during the data collection when Student 3 said she would watch shows at her cousin's house that her parents wouldn't let her watch at home. A good way for parents to mediate what their children watch is to be aware of what their children are watching and watch it with them (Austin et al., 1999). Another effective form of parental mediation is instructive mediation, where parents discuss television's content with their children (Austin et al., 1999). This can provide a smooth segway into topics that may be difficult to talk about with children.

This research has looked at some of the social reasons why youth watch television. It's important for parents to realize that making friends at this age is especially important for pre-adolescents. When children have similar television interests, it can help them build friendships and fulfill needs they are experiencing at the pre-adolescent stage. By taking television completely away, parents could hinder certain social aspects in their child's life.

Parents should talk to their children about being media literate to help the youth understand how television works. Media literacy calls for active processing of consumed media (Geiger et al., 2001). If someone is media literate he/she can critically look at the myriad of messages the media sends. Television spews out political and social opinions, which then influence people's values, culture, ethics (Brown, 1998). Although the United States is the leading exporter of media, it is behind other major English-speaking countries worldwide in educating youth about the media (Kubey, 1998). Schoolteachers should also devote time to educating their students about how the media works. Web sites such as pbskids.org/dontbuyit/ are specifically designed to help students understand how advertising works, the difference between media portrayals and real life, and how people in the media are enhanced to look better than they are. By teaching children to be media literate, parents and teachers can help their children enjoy the entertainment television offers, yet help their children avoid a skewed perspective on life.

Future Research

Talking with youth about television was a successful experience because of their openness and perspective on it. As the research suggests, the students use television as a way to ease social encounters, so talking about television with the researcher wasn't awkward for them. The students also enjoyed talking about this question—as evident in this conversation conducted in one of the focus groups:

R: Last question, then you're all done.

14: I want to stay here.

Another female: Yeah, same here.

R: Do you guys want to talk about TV all day?

Multiple voices: Yes.

R: Everyone but (Student) 17. Do you guys like talking about this, or is it because you just don't want to be in class?

Unidentifiable voice: It's fun to discuss.

Unidentifiable voice: I'm having fun.

Unidentifiable voice: I am too.

4: I'm actually having fun, but not being in class just adds to it.

The students' willingness and comfort in talking about television use with someone they didn't know incredibly well, strengthens the argument that television can be used to ease social situations. Future researchers could apply this study and test the theories presented in this research.

The researcher noticed that within the class that was studied, some of the most popular students and the closest friends were the ones who were the heaviest television viewers. A future study could conduct similar research to this one, but in addition to finding out the amount of television the students watched and their dedication to it, a researcher could also attempt to measure students' popularity. With those results a researcher could see if there were connections between the students television use and popularity.

This research could also be applied in other settings throughout the United States and even internationally to see if similar results surfaced and reinforce the validity of this research's grounded theory. A similar study could also look at students' use in various grades, instead of just sixth grade. High school students may have different reasons for watching television—they probably also have experienced what it is like to have a job

and earn money, so their concept of one million dollars could be more realistic. The participants in this research were Caucasian; conducting research with a more racially (and perhaps socio-economical and religiously) diverse group could also be beneficial.

Conclusion

This research complements pervious, established social and communication theories; it also opens new doors for future prosocial research in relation to mass communication. Looking at how youth use television and how they implement and internalize its messages is important as illustrated by this research. As we being to understand the pre-adolescents' reasoning, we learn more about how they view, grasp, and construct reality.

Television is a powerful tool—to some extent recognize youth and understand how it affects their lives and influences their perceptions. This research has captured how their sociality is influenced by watching television; the research has portrayed television viewing in a way that doesn't focus on negative effects such as violence or obesity, but on prosocial effects. By looking at how youth use the television in the context of their developmental needs, we can be aware of the pre-adolescents' interpretations of this powerful and often-used medium.

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APPENDIX A

Breakdown of Students' Final Decisions

The last thing the researcher asked the students during the focus group was the million-dollar question. Table 6 is a simple breakdown of how many students in each group would choose the television over the money and vice versa. These are their final answers that were given at the end of the data collection. Not surprisingly, most of the students in the heavy viewing group said they would keep their television.

Table 6: Breakdown of Types of Viewers

GROUP	# of students who would take TV	# of students who would take $
Light	3	3
Medium	2	4
Heavy	5	1*

* This student said he would keep the television if the economy were better.

Table 7 also looks at the students' final decisions, but this table compares the amount of television that a student watched when he/she kept a media journal with his/her final decision—the answer he/she gave to the million-dollar question during the focus group.

Table 7: Students' Final Decision

Student	Television use (in hours)*	Final decision
10	0 (light viewer)	$
11	.5 (light viewer)	$
16	.5 (light viewer)	TV
8	.7 (light viewer)	$
6	.7 (light viewer)	TV
19	.83 (light viewer)	TV
14	1 (medium viewer)	TV
7	1.125 (medium viewer)	$
4	1.3 (medium viewer)	$
15	1.375 (medium viewer)	$
1	1.5 (medium viewer)	TV
17	1.83 (medium viewer)	$
3	2 (medium viewer)	?**
13	4 (heavy viewer)	$
5	4 (heavy viewer)	TV
18	5 (heavy viewer)	TV
12	5.4 (heavy viewer)	TV
9	6.8 (heavy viewer)	TV
2	8.4 (heavy viewer)	TV

Total responses: TV=10 students, $=8 students

* Daily average of self-reported data from five days
** Student three was absent on the day her focus group was held and she eventually withdrew from school because of a serious illness. However, her final response in her personal interview was to take the money over the television.

Interview Schedule

Sample questions from in-depth interview:

- o What were you thinking when you wrote this essay?
- o What would you buy with the money you would get you took the money instead of the television?
- o What would you feel like you were missing out on if you chose the television?
- o Would it be hard not to watch television if you gave it up?
- o What are your favorite television shows and characters? Why?
- o Are there any characters you imitate?
- o What hobbies and interests do you have?
- o What kind of shows do you like?
- o When do you usually watch?
- o What shows do your friends watch?
- o Do you talk with friends about the television shows?
- o What would you talk about with your friends if there were no television?
- o How do you feel about television?
- o Do you watch more television shows now or when you were younger?
- o Do you quote characters?
- o Do you have a television in your room?
- o Do you learn things from watching television?

Sample questions from focus groups:
- o Have you ever done anything that you saw on television first?
- o What do you think is real on television?
- o Do you ever picture yourselves as characters?
- o Are there things you could see on television that they wouldn't see anywhere else?
- o Would you give up television for one million dollars?

APPENDIX C

Consent to be a Research Subject

Consent to be a research subject

The purpose of this research study is to determine why youth find television valuable. Emily Smurthwaite, a graduate student in the Department of Communications at Brigham Young University is conducting this study. Your child was selected for participation because of his/her age and because their teacher expressed interest in allowing her class to participate. The information gathered from your child will be analyzed for a master's thesis.

If involved in the research, your child will be asked to write a brief essay about whether he/she would give up television for a certain amount of money. The researcher then will talk with him/her personally and in a small group with follow-up questions about his/her television use and beliefs. The writing portion of this research will take about ten minutes. The group interview will take 30-40 minutes. All research will be conducted during the school day.

There are no physical or psychological risks in this research. One benefit will be that your child will recognize and analyze his/her television use.

Participation in this research is voluntary. Parents and students have the right to refuse to participate and the right to withdraw later without any jeopardy to his/her grades. Strict confidentiality will be maintained. No individual identifying information will be disclosed. All identifying references will be removed and replaced by control numbers. All data collected in this research study will be stored in a secure area and access will only be given to personnel associated with the study. Results of this study may be published in an academic journal or book or presented at a conference. The thesis may also be placed online.

If you have any questions regarding this research project, you may contact Emily Smurthwaite, 775 TNRB Brigham Young University, Provo, UT, 84602: (801) 422-1152.

If you have questions regarding your rights or your child's rights as a participant in a research project, you may contact Dr. Shane S. Schulthies, Chair of the Institutional Review Board, 120B RB, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT 84602; phone, (801) 422-5490.

The return of this permission slip is your consent to allow your child participate in this research. Thank you for your time.

I have read, understood, and received a copy of the above consent, and will allow my child to participate in this study.

Student's name: _____

Parent's signature: _____ Date: _____

Student Assent:

Student Assent:

I agree to participate in Emily Smurthwaite's interviews and essay about my television use.

I understand that if I choose not to participate that my grade will not be penalized.

I realize I can stop participating in this project at any time without any punishment.

I know my answers will be anonymous.

I have read, understood, and received a copy of the above consent, and desire of my own free will and volition, to participate in this study.

Student signature: _____ Date: _____

Media Use Journal

TELEVISION:
Yesterday I watched _____ hours of television:
- ❑ 0
- ❑ .5 hours
- ❑ 1 hour
- ❑ 2 hours
- ❑ 3 hours
- ❑ 4 hours
- ❑ 5 hours
- ❑ 6 or more hours

If you watched television please write the shows you watched:
1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
7.
8.

INTERNET:
Yesterday I spent _____ hours on the Internet.
- ❑ 0
- ❑ .5 hours
- ❑ 1 hour
- ❑ 2 hours
- ❑ 3 hours
- ❑ 4 hours
- ❑ 5 hours
- ❑ 6 or more hours

Web sites I visited:
1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
7.
8.

MOVIES:
Yesterday I watched movies for _____ hours.
- ❑ 0
- ❑ .5 hours
- ❑ 1 hour
- ❑ 2 hours
- ❑ 3 hours
- ❑ 4 hours
- ❑ 5 hours
- ❑ 6 or more hours

The movies I watched were:
1.
2.
3.

VIDEO GAMES:
Yesterday I played video games for _____ hours.
- ❑ 0
- ❑ .5 hours
- ❑ 1 hour
- ❑ 2 hours
- ❑ 3 hours
- ❑ 4 hours
- ❑ 5 hours
- ❑ 6 or more hour

Video games I played:
1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
7.