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**Children's video usage: A comparative study of nine to
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Welins, Seth P., Ph.D.

City University of New York, 1989

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CHILDREN'S VIDEO USAGE: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF
NINE-TO-ELEVEN YEAR OLDS LIVING IN LONDON AND NEW YORK

by

SETH P. WELINS

A dissertation to the Graduate Faculty in Sociology in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

1989

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Sociology in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

CHILDREN'S VIDEO USAGE: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF
NINE-TO-ELEVEN YEAR OLDS LIVING IN LONDON AND NEW YORK

by

Seth P. Welins

Adviser: Professor William Kornblum

The goal of this cross-cultural study identifies which video and non-video related activities are selected by nine-to-eleven year old children living in New York and London, England. Four hundred children were surveyed and interviewed about their television and VCR viewing habits and their use of computers and computer/video games as well as their after-school, non-video activities.

A uses-gratifications approach provides a general framework for the analyses of the data. These data show that there is a complex interplay between children's activity choices and the occupational status of the child's parents, the child's race/ethnicity, gender, ecological environment, family structure and social structure.

Some of the more significant findings show: 1) Children watch TV for approximately two hours and twenty minutes each day. Their viewing threshold is approximately three hours. 2) Ownership and usage of bedroom TVs is positively associated with the amount of time children spend watching TV. 3) Boys are more likely

to own and use computers and computer/video games than are girls. Boys are also more likely to watch cartoons than are girls. The content of these TV programs and software items appear to be more gratifying for boys than for girls. 4) There is virtually no relationship between children's reading level and the amount of time children watch TV and the kinds of TV programs they watch. However, children who read for pleasure and own computers are more likely to have high reading levels than are children who do not read and do not own computers. 5) New Yorkers are much more likely to own nearly every kind of video hardware and software than are Londoners. 6) Occupational status is not consistently associated with video hardware and software ownership. High-status parents are more likely to own computers than are low-status parents, but low-status parents are more likely to place TVs in their children's bedrooms. In New York, VCR ownership is positively related to occupational status. In London, VCR ownership is negatively related to occupational status.

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Dr. Hammond gave tremendous amount of time to this project. His criticisms were constructively presented, always insightful, and, often times, witty. I am grateful for his honesty and his extraordinary dedication.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Television viewing interferes with children's cognitive development, but children acquire a great deal of information from television. Video games and cartoons provide children with socially acceptable outlets for aggressive feelings, but violent and aggressive behavior can be attributed to video game usage and cartoon viewing. Children spend too much time playing and too little time studying, but playtime helps children develop important social skills. Parents buy television sets, computers and video games for their children because children ask for these items. Children ask for these items because parents do not spend enough time with their children. Children would rather watch television and play video games than spend time with their parents. Parents encourage children to watch television and use video games because they do not want to spend time with their children.

The above contradictory statements are periodically discussed and often hotly debated at parent-teacher conferences, academic symposia and government hearings as well as in mass-market periodicals and scholarly publications. Each statement has been persuasively defended by one or another discussant, writer, or researcher, but no consensus as yet exists as to whether children are, indeed, misusing their leisure time and whether specific leisure activities are intrinsically harmful to children. The only point of general agreement is that on any given weekday, children spend six to seven hours watching television, playing video and computer

games, doing schoolwork, and/or interacting with peers and adults.

The research project reported in this paper was undertaken to shed light on some of the factors fueling debates about the role of television viewing in children's lives. This cross-cultural study involved surveying and interviewing 401 children between the ages of 9-11 living in New York and London, England, in order to ascertain what factors influence children's choices of leisure-time activities in general, and video use in particular.

The overall goal of this research report is to describe, examine and interpret how children use television and other newly developed video media and, in turn, how their use of any video media fits into the scope of their leisure-time activities and into the the interlocking systems of their social, economic and psychological lives. In keeping with this goal, the underlying task is first to identify which leisure-time activities are made available to children (the "menu") and then to identify which activities children actually select. Taken into account are a variety of possible determinants of both the "menu" available and the selection process: children's socio-economic backgrounds, their cultural environment, their psycho-social stage of development, family structure, race/ethnicity and gender.

In theoretical terms, much of the confusion and apparent contradictions seen in debates and dialogues about the impact of TV on children's lives is partially the result of researchers and discussants adopting differing levels of attention when looking at a child's

life, i.e., whether a "macro" or a "micro" analytical view is taken.

The micro-analytic view of children's behavior focuses primarily upon cognitive and psychological factors associated with a child's psycho-social stage of development and an individual's freedom to choose from the variagate "menu" of leisure-time activities. From this theoretical perspective, the child is generally regarded as a free agent who consciously decides to engage in those activities which are most apt to gratify particular sets of needs.

In contrast, the macro-analytic view focuses upon the many limitations imposed upon a child by the pre-set structure of society into which a child is born. From this theoretical perspective, the child's behavior is shaped by outside forces that are beyond the child's control. In particular, social institutions, such as schools, as well as the child's parents' occupational status and societal attitudes and values associated with the child's race, ethnicity, and gender influence how children utilize their free time. From this perspective, children are seen as the objects of agents of social control rather than free agents.

As presented above, the micro and macro points of view do not purport to be mutually exclusive perspectives since the child's social and cultural environments continually interact with many types of children's behavior and children's behavior often interacts with aspects of the child's social structure, particularly familial and peer relationships (Blumler, Gurevitch and

Katz,1985). But the contrast provides a theoretical platform for building an understanding of the complex issues presented in this study. The following research report is an attempt to sort out and clarify some of the factors affecting children's use of television and their leisure-time activities in the total context of their lives.

Theoretical Framework

The uses and gratifications approach provides a general framework for the analyses of the data obtained from this research project, although the approach is applied here in a rather eclectic way. Most simply, this approach enables researchers to understand how and why children engage in specific leisure-time pursuits by focusing on the consumers' uses of leisure activities and the gratifications they derive from these chosen activities.

"There is broad agreement that the uses and gratifications tradition developed (sometimes knowingly, sometimes unwittingly) on the shoulders of functionalist paradigms in sociology and psychology" (Blumler and Katz, 1974:15). For the most part, the uses-gratification study of mass communications "has been approached by adopting the perspective of the audience member and by asking what uses and satisfactions he derives from media content, and what appeal media content has for him" (McQuail and Gurevitch, 1974:287). This emphasis upon the audience member and media content seems to have been especially the case during the "childhood" and "adolescence" in the

evolution of uses and gratifications research, according to Blumler and Katz (1974:13):

In its 'childhood' of the 1940s and 1950s, the emphasis of much work in this vein was on insightful description of audience subgroup orientations to selected media content forms...Then, in the 'adolescence' of the late 1960s, the core emphasis of many studies was switched to an operationalization of the the social and psychological variables presumed to give rise to differentiated patterns of media consumption...If we are not mistaken to discern an entry into maturity in the 1970s, then its core tendency probably centers in turn on attempts to use gratifications data to provide explanations of such other facets of the communication process with which audience motives and expectations may be connected.

In line with the overall evolution of the uses-gratifications tradition, the analyses presented in this research report are both descriptive and explanatory. As a descriptive report, it identifies the kinds of leisure activities that children typically engage in on any given day. As an explanatory report, it presents an interpretation of why these activity choices are made. A uses-gratifications perspective will provide a general framework for these analyses.

The way in which the uses-gratifications tradition has evolved has led Blumler and Katz to conclude that it is not a general theory of leisure-time behavior and media use of children (or even of adults), but it is a "research strategy that can provide a home for a variety of hypotheses about specific communication phenomena (and leisure-time behaviors in general) and a testing ground for propositions about audience orientations stemming from more than one sociological or psychological theory" (Blumler and Katz, 1974:15). This perspective is, almost by definition, a rather eclectic one for explaining

children's behavior, insofar as it is concerned with a variety of factors which Blumler, Katz and Gurevitch (1974:20) identify as follows:

- (1) the social and psychological origins of
- (2) needs, which generate
- (3) expectations of
- (4) the mass media or other sources, which lead to
- (5) differential patterns of media exposure (or engagement in other activities), resulting in
- (6) need gratifications and
- (7) other consequences, perhaps mostly unintended ones."

As outlined above, the uses and gratifications tradition originating under the umbrella of functional analysis provides the framework for analyzing the data gathered in this research project. This tradition has evolved from consideration of mostly the effects of media use upon the ultimate consumer to consideration of the nature and characteristics of the audience itself. So, the tradition has expanded to incorporate both psychological and sociological forces which may effect the nature and characteristics of the audience before, in a sense, the audience even has a chance to encounter and select from the "menu" that the mass media has to offer. Other agents of social control (e.g. parents, teachers, siblings, peers) may intervene and alter the relationship between the producers and the ultimate consumers of the mass media.

Blumler, Katz and Gurevitch's description of the uses-gratifications perspective suggests that need

gratifications are an end-result of a process, beginning with the user's micro-motivational mental state and continuing with the user's pursuit of specific activities. The expanded description of this perspective which will be employed in this study considers many aspects of the user's macro-structural environment as an essential part of the uses-gratifications process, since it either constrains or supports the user's choice of activity.

Micro-Motivational Component of the Uses-Gratifications Perspective

From this end of the uses and gratifications process, children (as well as adults) are viewed as free agents, in other words, active consumers of the mass media and other leisure-time activities. Children consult TV listings, respond to peer group influences, and directly or indirectly influence their parents' decisions to purchase video items. The decision to watch television or to participate in any leisure activity is seen as a rational, conscious, and goal-oriented choice: the goal being gratification of needs. Accordingly, children are seen as actively pursuing those specific activities which satisfy their psychological and social needs.

Researchers' descriptions and explanations of behavior in micro-motivational terms focus upon the child's psychological, intellectual and emotional stages of development. The emphasis, therefore, is upon the mental state of the child before and during engagement in any leisure-time activity. Activity choices are seen as an expression of the child's desire to find ways of gratifying social and psychological needs.

Although Schramm (1961) did not use the words "micro-motivational" in his study, Television in the Lives of Our Children, he did see children as relatively free agents who actively and purposefully select from their environment those cultural items which satisfy their social and psychological needs. In another study, Schramm (1959:10) emphasized the importance of "what children do with television [and their other leisure-time activities], rather than what television [and other leisure-time activities] do to children". Both studies were done within the uses and gratifications tradition of functionalist research of the mass media.

The micro-motivational component of the uses and gratifications tradition makes a presumption that points out the necessity of including a complementary outlook (the macro-structural component) when analyzing children's leisure-time activities.

This presumption is that children, as well as adults, recognize their own needs and select their leisure activities accordingly. But even adults are not likely to be fully cognizant of their own needs, much less fully aware of whether these needs originate within themselves or result mostly from external influences. Children are probably even less able than adults at recognizing their own needs, distinguishing outside influences and selecting the specific leisure-time activities which gratify their "own" unique needs.

Therefore, no behavior or need can be evaluated solely from a micro-motivational or macro-structural perspective. People's needs are reflections of both

internal psychological and physical traits as well as external social structures. Behaviors and needs, therefore, should be described and analyzed from either a predominantly micro-motivational or predominantly macro-structural rather than exclusively from one perspective.

Macro-Structural Component of the Uses-Gratifications Perspective

The macro-structural component of the uses and gratifications tradition examines children's leisure-time behavior in terms of the constraints imposed by the norms and values of the child's socio-cultural affiliations and parents' socio-economic status.

This approach assumes that children have very few activity options from which to choose since forces beyond the child's control virtually dictate which activity options are made available to the child.

McQuail and Gurevitch (1974), Mendelsohn (1974) and Marcuse (1972) use what in this research report is designated as the macro-structural approach to the uses and gratifications tradition.

McQuail and Gurevitch (1974:291) believe that "Audience expectations and satisfactions derived from the media should be explained primarily in terms of 1) the patterns of media materials that are made available and 2) the customs, norms, and conventions-defining what counts as appropriate ways of using and reacting to media provision-that prevail in particular societal settings. Both of these are molded, in turn, by social-structural and cultural factors. Thus, audience behavior is seen as being prescribed by structural and cultural factors."

According to Mendelsohn (1974:306), "It is precisely media-related needs that seem to be culturally anchored and uniquely responsive to specific societal expectations and norms that vary therefore from group to group. As such, media related activities often function as instruments for regulating audience behavior." Likewise, Marcuse (1964:5) focuses on the needs and gratifications of the agents of social control, rather than on the needs and gratifications of the individual consumer of media output. Marcuse suggests that people's social and psychological needs-purportedly satisfied by the video media and other leisure activities-are in fact false needs "superimposed upon the individual by particular social interests... and external powers over which the individual has no control. Most of the prevailing needs to relax, to have fun, to behave and consume in accordance with the advertisements, to love and hate what others love and hate, belong to this category of false needs." Consequently, children's needs are not always gratified by the activities they pursue since children can choose leisure-time activities only from a restricted "menu" pre-selected by various agents of control such as television programmers, corporate sponsors, parents and teachers. Underlying the process of selection are the factors which impact upon children: A child's access to television and other options for leisure-time activities are fully dependent upon the socio-economic and cultural status of his or her parents.

If, as McQuail and Gurevitch, Mendelsohn and Marcuse suggest, adults are vulnerable to manipulation of their

needs by external factors in the social structure, then children are even more vulnerable to manipulation since many more layers of societal control reign over children's lives. Their own parents, relatives, friends, and teachers are agents of social control who act as intermediaries and buffers (whether they consciously know it or not) between the children and the leisure-time activity "menu" made available and appealing to children by "higher-ups." As a result, children are not purely free agents who rationally select their leisure-time activities from a clean slate, without being influenced by social, economic and cultural factors. These factors are largely beyond any individual's personal control, especially when the individual is a child subject to the discipline and control of many adults.

We see, therefore, that there are at least several valid, yet conflicting, explanations of how and why children choose specific leisure time activities. The micro-motivational position assumes that children make very rational leisure time activity choices based upon their perceptions of their immediate needs and desires. This position is countered by the macro-structural argument that because children are usually unaware of their "true" psychological needs, activity choices are not rationally made and the activities do not gratify the needs they purportedly are supposed to gratify. The macro-structural position assumes that children have very few activity options from which to choose since forces beyond the child's control, such as the interests of the State, the social fabric worn by the child and the

attitudes and motivations of the child's parents virtually dictate which activity options are made available to children. But this position is countered by the micro-motivational argument that while children might have subordinate positions in society, they are not powerless. Within specified boundaries, children can and do make activity choices and they can and do influence many kinds of parental decisions (particularly whether video items are purchased).

If we are to successfully utilize the uses-gratifications approach as a tool to explain children's leisure time activity behavior in general, and video use in particular, then we will have to consider all these theoretical positions. Even though these positions appear to be antithetical, they do often complement each other, since external control and individual choice often co-exist within a child's world.

Activity control can be seen as a reflection of the needs of parents, teachers, and other super-ordinate agents to socialize children according to their own values and norms, while activity choice can be seen as an expression of the child's desire to find ways to gratify his social and psychological needs.

By emphasizing either activity choice (micro-motivational) or activity control (macro-structural), children can be seen, respectively, as active and/or passive consumers of leisure time activities. That is, children actively choose those activities which seem to gratify their psychological and social needs. However, these selections are passively chosen from a limited menu

of activities that is largely constructed by agents of social control. This menu of activities reflects complex interactions occurring among various components of each child's social and physical environment-factors that the child might be able to influence but definitely not control.

This interplay among the many sub-systems in the child's environment is described in Bronfenbrenner's The Ecology of Human Development (1979). He stresses the importance of examining specific behavior in the context of the person's entire social system, rather than considering each behavior in isolation of that system. He sees children's development as "a progressive, mutual accomodation between an active, growing human being and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives, as this process is affected by relations between these settings, and by the larger contexts in which these settings are embedded" (Bronfenbrenner,1979:21).

If, as Bronfenbrenner assumes, life sub-systems are interrelated, then a change in any leisure time routine could trigger realignments between some video and non-video related activities. Such changes could have destabilizing influences on children and parents whenever a newly introduced video item interferes with the family's social functions.

Research done by Coleman, et al. (1966) and Jencks (1972) accords with Bronfenbrenner's model. They believe that a child's non-academic life affects academic achievement, which in turn, influences the child's future

socio-economic status. Coleman et al. showed that the amount and quality of schooling is fairly stable as compared with the disparate elements of family life. Nonetheless, what happens in the home and in the streets can play an equally critical role in a child's academic development. Likewise, Jencks demonstrated that non-cognitive characteristics, such as family background (and, presumably, attitudes and values associated with these characteristics) explain as much of a child's future economic status as does what children learn in school. Thus, Coleman, et al. and Jencks (although focusing upon the effects of academic achievement upon a child's future socio-economic status) clearly indicate that activities outside of the classroom forcefully impact upon children's achievement and, in the long run, upon children's future social and economic status.

Overall, the results of the research project reported upon in this paper show that television viewing, either directly or indirectly, influences nearly every activity that children engage in, including family interactions, schoolwork, and playtime. In fact, we cannot truly understand any aspect of a child's home life without also examining that child's television viewing behavior and its relationship to all other social sub-systems of the child. This study will, therefore, be primarily concerned with TV viewing (and related video hardware and software, such as VCRs, computers, and video/computer games) and the relationship of these items with children's overall behavior.

Media Displacement

A.C. Nielsen (1984) and other media researchers demonstrate that children spend between 24 to 30 hours per week in front of the television-an amount equal to or even surpassing the amount of time children spend in school.

Many parents, teachers and social scientists believe that children are harmed by watching television too often, especially when TV programs seem to emphasize sex or violence (Medrich, et al., 1982; Gerbner and Gross, 1972; Atkin, C., 1980; Singer and Singer, 1987). Consequently, social scientists, parents and other people closely associated with children routinely try to steer youngsters away from watching television. Any other activity-such as outdoor playing, reading, and listening to music-is assumed to be superior to watching television.

The data collected for this study reported upon here generally confirm that children spend a lot of time each week watching television, but the data also suggest a fundamental flaw in the strategy adopted by those recommending ways to turn kids away from heavy TV watching. Those seeking to cut down on children's TV viewing time by encouraging alternate, non-video activities may sometimes fail to see that alternate activities are not functional substitutes. In other words, the alternatives do not offer the same gratifications provided by watching TV.

The question of "media displacement" was considered by Schramm, Lyle and Parker (1961) and Himmelweit, Oppenheim and Vince (1958) when television was first introduced. They showed that some activities which they

(perhaps wrongfully) considered to be functionally equivalent to television (such as movies and radio listening) were displaced by television. But they, and others, did not find that television necessarily replaces functionally dissimilar activities.

The introduction of new video related items into children's homes poses the same kinds of questions that were raised 40 years ago when television was first introduced. Parents, teachers and social scientists want to know if VCRs, computers and computer/video games displace non-video related activities such as reading, playing, doing homework and interacting with family members. In addition, they want to know if these new, video related activities are also displacing television usage. "The rapid evolution of media technology also forces individuals in modern society to confront a constantly varying array of choices. We would thus expect changes in both media consumption behaviors and media structures to be the norm rather than the exception (Palmgreen, Wenner, and Rosengren, 1985:35).

The data in this report neither confirms nor refutes the media displacement theory. The data will show that video and non-video related activities are more likely to co-exist with each other than to displace one another. For example, we will see that TV often temporally co-exists with non-video activities, such as homework, family and peer interactions, outdoor and indoor playtime, eating and reading. Under these conditions, children tend to divide their attention between TV and another activity, with neither activity displacing the other. Likewise, if

the day is not long enough to do all the activities they want to do, children will either shorten the time allocated to each activity or they will do several activities at the same time-they try not to eliminate a favorite activity, such as television viewing, from their schedule.

However, one activity might displace another because of its ability to gratify a child's immediate sets of needs. For example, VCRs (items that can be considered functionally similar to television) did displace regular TV usage, but only when the regular broadcast programming was not particularly gratifying. When the programming was gratifying, most children did not use the VCR, even though many children had access to an extensive library of tapes.

Greenberg (1974) showed that television provides many different kinds of gratifications for children, but the needs that are gratified vary considerably according to the age and moods of the child as well as the attitudes and motives of the child and the parents. That is why this study utilizes a more narrowly defined two year age group category than do Roper and Nielsen (they use six year age group categories).

Consequently, it is reasonable to assume that while each and every video and non-video activity gratifies a specific set of needs for specific age groups, those needs and gratifications are also specific to the circumstances surrounding that activity. Thus, depending on the age and motives of the child and parents, a television can alternately function as a baby-sitter, teacher, film library, fantasy-maker, and/or universal cultural

institution.

This study will show that children play video games for a few minutes, watch bits and pieces of TV shows, or watch TV programs that they do not really enjoy. In order to fully understand the uses and gratifications of these activities, we must apply Bronfenbrenner's Ecology Model to the circumstances surrounding the children's decisions for engaging in the activities, rather than merely assuming that these activities are, in fact, gratifying children's needs because the children are engaging in these activities.

Parents have latent and manifest agendas for purchasing video items for their children and for encouraging their children to use these items. Children, as pointed out in the preceding paragraph, have their own agendas for using them. We must acknowledge televiewing (in all its forms) as being a complicated social activity that intersects with and affects many other sub-systems within children's lives.

Comparative studies of individual media use are very weakly represented in present uses and gratifications research. Both Weibull (1985) and Rosengren (1985) urge more cross-cultural analyses of media use. Therefore, this research report provides comparative information about after-school activities available to most nine-to eleven-year old children in London and New York. By comparing the leisure-time activities of two samples of children who reside in very similar, yet distinct urban settings, we examined how children's leisure time behavior varies under different sets of conditions. Thus, we can

see how various kinds of television programming is related to children's choices of programs and how different environments either support or hinder children's choices of activities. Such a comparative study enables us to establish prescriptive standards for video item ownership and usage and non-video related activities for New York and London children.

The following report is divided into nine chapters. Each chapter contains a brief review of the relevant social science literature pertaining to that chapter's focus.

Chapter two covers the procedural methods of this study, including the demographic features of the 401 children who comprise the New York and London samples and a description of how the data for this study were collected.

Chapter three describes the kind and amount of video hardware and software owned by the London and New York families. New York families tended to own many more video items than did London families. In general, parents' occupational status and ethnicity appeared to exert much stronger influences on video item ownership in London than they did in New York. Apparently, because London TV programming is not directed to the needs of ethnic minorities as is New York UHF programming, higher percentages of certain London ethnic groups tended to own VCRs than did comparable groups in New York.

Chapter four provides extensive analyses of children's television viewing behavior. It presents data on the amount of time children used TVs and VCRs, and also

analyzes how and why children watched particular types of programs. Televiewing behavior was fairly similar for most nine-to eleven-year olds, regardless of their ethnic, social and cultural background. However, some ethnic groups were more likely than other groups to watch certain types of programs. Each TV program category seemingly has a particular set of characteristics appealing to the needs and interests of specific ethnic groups. In addition, Blacks tended to watch higher levels of television than did children in other ethnic groups. Social and environmental conditions perhaps discouraged Black children in both cities from playing outdoors so these children spent more time indoors watching TV than did comparable groups of children in the other ethnic groups. Finally, New York boys were found to be more likely to watch cartoons than were New York girls, maybe because the violent content of New York cartoons was more appealing to boys than to girls. In London, where cartoons were non-violent, there were no differences between gender groups.

Chapter five discusses the relationship between television usage, computer ownership, and other video items and academic achievement. Although no direct link was found between television usage and reading level, children who simultaneously did homework and watched TV were much more likely to have low reading levels than were children who did homework without watching TV. The data also showed a strong, positive association between computer ownership and reading level, even when we controlled for parents' occupational status.

Chapter six describes how the new video media, such

as VCRs, computers and computer games, were integrated into the lives of children and their families. For many children, VCRs allowed children to re-watch favorite films, much as they would re-read favorite books. Even though VCRs were not used by many children, computer games were quite popular. Boys were much more likely than were girls to own and play with computers and video/computer games; apparently the content and presentation of these games were more gratifying to boys than to girls. Each of these video-related items afforded children many different usage options which children maximized by adapting the media items to their own needs.

Chapter seven discusses children's choices of specific non-video and video-related activities. On any given day, almost all children engaged in many kinds of video and non-video activities and their participation in one form of activity generally did not preclude participation in others. However, Londoners and New Yorkers who read for pleasure spent significantly less time watching television than did children who did not read. London's social, environmental and ecological conditions appeared to promote outdoor playtime while corresponding conditions in New York tended to discourage outdoor playtime.

Chapter eight discusses how the location of video media placement within the home influenced family relationships. Most children preferred to watch television with other family members, whether or not the children had separate TV sets in their own rooms. However, parents who had a television in their bedroom tended to have children

who watched alone. A child's need to spend viewing time with parents appeared to be stronger than a parent's need to spend TV viewing time with children. Furthermore, parents seem to control the household viewing environment. Through this control, parents give subtle and overt messages to children about whom they should watch television with and, consequently, whom they should interact with.

Chapter nine summarizes the findings of this study and discusses their implications for future research and educational policy.

This is one of the first studies to analyze how children use newly developed video items. It is also one of very few studies which compares leisure activity behavior and media usage of two cross-matched cultures. But perhaps most importantly, it focuses on a restricted age range of nine-to-eleven year old children. Except for a few studies that focused on this age group, notably Winick and Winick (1979) and Winick (1987), this age group that has been largely ignored by previous social science research. This study provides social scientists, parents and educators with important information about our children's lives and needs. Hopefully, it will help us to better understand how media-related items gratify these needs.

CHAPTER TWO
METHODS OF PROCEDURE

A Review of Media Survey Literature

Media researchers frequently encounter procedural difficulties since their subjects are not always aware or capable of describing their viewing habits. These problems are exacerbated in children's media research because children have particularly short attention spans and limited powers of recall. Researchers have, therefore, developed a myriad of methods and procedures in an attempt to enhance the reliability of children as research subjects. This study utilizes the best approaches used in previous studies in order to maximize the accuracy of the respondents' answers.

Some researchers-such as, Schramm, Lyle and Parker (1961); Lyle and Hoffman (1972); Himmelweit et al. (1958); Fetler (1982); Abel (1976)-administered group questionnaires to pre-teenagers in school settings. Self-administered questionnaires enabled these previous researchers to efficiently and inexpensively gather data from very large numbers of children, but they also precluded the possibility of monitoring the accuracy of the subjects' interpretation of, and responses to, the questions.

Lyle and Hoffman (1972) noted the difficulty for young subjects in responding to items in a self-administered questionnaire about their previous night's televiewing without their first knowing what "viewing" actually meant. Interviewers would have to explain to children that in

order to indicate on the questionnaire that they had indeed watched a particular program, they would first have to recall if they had watched at least a minimum number of minutes of the program.

In order to compute a truly accurate viewing time score on the self-administered questionnaire, a young child would have to remember, one or more days later, exactly when he began seeing the program and the time he actually spent watching the program. The child would also have to account for any time spent out of the room and any time spent doing other activities while the television program was aired. These times would then have to be subtracted from the total time of the program being watched. Thus, many children in the above cited studies were probably unable to accurately determine how much time they spent watching television if they had been asked to complete a self-administered questionnaire and had to account for all these viewing factors.

Schramm et al. (1961) and Medrich (1982), as well as this researcher, therefore, conducted in-depth interviews with many, if not all of, the children who filled out self-administered questionnaires. The interviews permitted us and previous researchers to follow-up incomplete and ambiguous responses to the questionnaire and pursue in greater detail characteristics of the child's television viewing habits. As seen later in the methods section of this chapter, this researcher also employed special procedures during the questionnaire and interview administrations in order to reduce respondents' confusion and raise the reliability of their responses.

To deal with children's memory lapses, researchers have often asked children to keep logs or diaries of their television viewing. The Nielsen and Roper organizations collect much of their viewing figures in this manner as did Schramm (1959) and Lyle and Hoffman (1971) and many others. This method invariably obtains erratic and inconsistent results.

Children very often forget to maintain their diaries for certain periods of time or they simply inserted programs into their diaries that they didn't actually watch. In addition, the diaries themselves possibly create a kind of Hawthorn effect on the children's viewing patterns, altering or influencing what the children do or do not actually see.

Audits of Great Britain, a television research organization, developed a new device which instantaneously records whether a respondent is watching a particular program. It has been in use in England and is now in use in the U.S.A. by Nielsen. According to The New York Times of October 15, 1985, these "people meters" have a distinct edge over diaries because "viewers can sometimes not remember all the programming they've watched in an hour." A related article in the April 17, 1986 edition of The New York Times reported that when people meters were tested against hand-written diaries, significant statistical discrepancies emerged, thereby at least partially discrediting data obtained from the diaries. We should bear in mind that most of the respondents in Nielsen's surveys are adults, not nine to 11 year old children. If adults have difficulty with diaries, we would expect this

data collection procedure to be even less reliable for children.

Various cross-validation techniques have also been used to test the accuracy and reliability of children's perceptions of their viewing habits. The most common strategy has been to question other family members about the subjects' viewing habits and match those responses with those of the subject. Medrich (1982), Rossiter and Robertson (1975), and Bower (1973) interviewed parents in their homes. Abel (1976) asked children to first complete questionnaires in school and then deliver other questionnaires to their mothers who subsequently answered questions about their child's viewing activities.

However, since parents generally do not supervise their children's televiewing, there usually is not a great deal of agreement between the parent's and the child's assessments (Robertson, 1979 and Schramm et al., 1959). In addition, this cross-validation method does not allow the researcher to know whether the parent or the child is providing accurate information when disagreements occur.

Brady, Stoneman and Sanders (1980), Chaffee (1976), Reid (1979) and others have observed children and parents watching television together within the natural setting of the home. While this method enabled the researchers to fairly accurately assess the interpersonal dynamics of television viewing, the presence of observers in the home most likely produced a "Hawthorn Effect" on viewing behaviors. In addition, relatively small samples dictated by this procedure prevented the researchers from generalizing their findings to the population.

This summary described research techniques which were utilized by researchers engaged in television survey analysis. Researchers interested in studying and measuring the effects of television on children devised alternate procedures and strategies which enabled them to observe children watching television in highly controlled, standardized laboratories, thereby exposing all the children to the same, specific independent variable under study. These laboratory experiments also allowed the researcher to expose the subjects to a variety of independent and control variables, manipulate the conditions of televiewing, and ultimately replicate the experiment under a variety of conditions and in a variety of localities. Kassler (1982), Liebert and Baron (1971) and Feshbach and Singer (1971) have primarily employed these experimental techniques to study the effects of violent programming on children, although these same techniques have also proved useful in children's market research and children's programming development.

Many commentators such as Noble (1975), have criticized these and other laboratory studies for utilizing artificial sets of viewing conditions and artificial settings and consequently obtaining artificial results as well.

Two very early studies on children's television viewing must be singled out for they were able to overcome many of the problems that these later studies encountered. Himmelweit's 1958 study of British children, Television and the Child, was conducted at a time when only 50% of the British population owned television sets. Schramm's

8th and 9th parts of the 11 part study, Television in the Lives of Our Children (1959), were conducted in two fairly comparable Canadian communities except that one was receiving television signals and the other was not. Both researchers were able to compare these experimental and control groups in their natural settings, attributing any significant academic and social differences between children to the dependent variable, television viewing.

Himmelweit's study was able to control for more variables than Schramm's study because the television sets in Britain were fairly widely distributed among the population. As a result, she was able to compare children in the same schools, the same classes, and the same socio-economic communities, thereby controlling for an extraordinarily large number of key independent variables related to academic ability and social development.

There are virtually no communities in the industrial world without television so social scientists, unfortunately, must make do with less than ideal experimental conditions. However, some researchers have conducted studies in developing countries which have moderate, but not universal, television ownership. Hornik (1978), for example, studied the effects of television on the academic achievement of El Salvadoran junior high school students, many of whom did not own television sets, thereby coming close to duplicating Himmelweit's and Schramm's optimal survey conditions.

Since approximately 98% of American homes have a television, experimental controls utilized by Schramm, Himmelweit and Hornik could not be employed in this study,

however; VCRs, computers, and computer/video games are examples of very new video-related media which were just becoming popular among the general populations in the United States and Great Britain at the time of this survey. As a result, this research was able to study very similar groups of children, the only major difference between the groups being ownership of these video items. We will try to determine if ownership and usage of these items have noticeable impacts on children's academic and social development as well as children's television viewing behavior and intra-familial interactions.

It seems clear from this brief review of media research methods that "...no single method is ever totally free of criticism, and that inference should depend on results from multiple methods" (Comstock and Lindsey, 1975:12-13). This study employed eclectic strategies which hopefully produced reliable and valid statistical results.

Survey Procedures

The research encompassed three strategies: 1) Administration of a 43-item questionnaire to 401 children, 2) In-depth interviews with approximately 75% of the students who responded to the questionnaire, and 3) Qualitative and quantitative analysis of the data obtained from these survey instruments.

The total sample consisted of 401 lower-middle, middle and upper-middle class fourth and fifth grade pupils (nine to eleven year olds) attending public schools in London, England, New York City and Manhasset, New York.

This particular age group was chosen for several reasons:

- 1) Prior research (See N.I.M.H.,1982:5) demonstrates that nine to eleven year olds tend to watch more television than do children in most other age groups and presumably are also more affected by television due to this increased exposure.
- 2) Nine to eleven year olds have generally developed enough academic skills to enable them to answer questions in a self-administered questionnaire.
- 3) Children in this age group begin to exercise some degree of independence with respect to leisure time activity choices, thus allowing analysis of a fairly varied series of behavior patterns and responses.
- 4) My extensive experience in teaching nine to eleven year olds in New York City public schools and in a London state-run school. These experiences enabled me to design age-appropriate questionnaires, develop very successful strategies for recruiting a large, fairly heterogeneous sample of children and efficiently and inexpensively implement the research design.

Survey Instruments

A questionnaire and an interview schedule were used to gather data on children's leisure time activities.

Questionnaire

The general purpose of the self-administered questionnaire was to record the patterns of children's leisure time activities, as they might have occurred over an extended period of time.

In the spring of 1983, the questionnaire and

interview schedule were pre-tested on fourth and fifth grade pupils attending a public school in Brooklyn, New York. This pre-test demonstrated that a self-administered questionnaire was an age-appropriate survey instrument for children at this academic level. But equally important, the pre-testing procedure helped identify some of the latent weaknesses of the questionnaire, interview schedule and overall survey design. This information proved to be extremely important for the development of the final survey instruments.

All London children responded to the questionnaire on Tuesday, September 18, 1984. The New York questionnaire was administered on Thursday, November 29, 1984.

The self-administered questionnaire consisted of 43 items. (See Appendix 1 for the New York version of the questionnaire.) The London version omitted question 40 because cable television was not available to British viewers. Also, due to technical problems, question 43 was inadvertently deleted from the questionnaire. This item was verbally offered to London children during the questionnaire administration, but many children did not write a response. There were other minor adjustments in the London version due to language and spelling differences.

The items in the questionnaire were designed to operationalize a series of key variables generally believed to be related to children's television viewing. These variables and their corresponding questions are summarized below.

- 1) Demographic information about the child's family:
Questions 1-7,20,27,34,40-41.
- 2) Indicators of parental control and influence over children's video media usage: Questions 9,12-13, 17-18,22,32-33,38-39.
- 3) Indicators which describe the respondent's family structure and familial interactions: Questions 9-13,15,26, 28-31,37,38-39.
- 4) Questions about other kinds of activities children engage in while viewing television: Questions 8,14,24.
- 5) Indicators of the time spent using video media: Questions 15-16, 35-36, 42-43.
- 6) Content analysis of children's program preferences: Questions 42-43.
- 7) Indicators of children's non-video time usage: Questions 19,21,23,25.

Individual Interview Schedule

The general purpose of the in-depth interviews, in contrast to the group questionnaire, was to record the patterns of children's most recent leisure time activities. (See Appendix 2 for the interview schedule).

A 15 minute individual interview was administered to 175 London children and 125 New York children. These interviews were conducted over a two week period in each city, commencing the day after the children completed the group questionnaire. These interviews served the following specific purposes:

- 1) To cross-validate some of the questions in the self-administered questionnaire.

2) To obtain additional information about the children's social behavior and cultural and economic background which could not be pursued via a self-administered questionnaire due to various constraints set by the various education officials.

3) To augment much of the data already collected by the questionnaires and, thus, provide a larger base from which to draw conclusions about children's video media use and other leisure time activities.

The London Education Authority would not permit me to ask children about their race, ethnicity or parents' occupational status on the questionnaire. Racial and ethnic affiliations were obtained in the interviews. With the exception of the Freetown's school in London, all other London head teachers and New York principals allowed me to ask children about their parents' occupations. In one case, the head teacher of Abbey Melton School furnished me with this information.

School, Class and Respondent Recruitment Procedures

This section will highlight how the schools, classes and children were recruited for the survey. Since most New York children are not randomly assigned to schools or classes and London children are not randomly assigned to schools, we must examine how these schools and classes were recruited for this study and how children were assigned to their respective schools and classes before we can begin to interpret the data which will be presented in later chapters of this study.

Recruitment of London Schools and Classes

The Director of Research and Statistics of the Inner London Education Authority and I decided to enlist five schools in North and Central London appearing to have ethnically and economically diverse student bodies. (The names of all schools participating in this study have been changed).

The research director initially contacted ten schools, informing them of the aims and requirements of the research project. She asked the head teachers of these schools to inform her if they did not want to participate in the survey. Five responded that they did not wish to participate. To my knowledge, administrative problems in a particular school were almost always responsible for that school's non-participation, rather than antipathy towards the research project.

Two of the five participating schools, (Freetown's and Abbey Melton, had predominantly upper-middle class student populations. These schools are located in Hampstead and in The City, respectively. Few Black children attended these two schools. Freetown's had a very diverse ethnic population, with the majority of children having middle and northern European backgrounds. The majority of the Abbey Melton population was White and British. A sizable number of Abbey Melton students lived in the upper-middle class borough of Islington, located several miles north of the school. Abbey Melton had a reputation for being fairly innovative and seemed to attract out-of-district students willing and able to commute to the school.

Hortaine School is located in a predominantly working class neighborhood that is just beginning to attract middle and upper middle class families. Yarbine School is also located in a predominantly working class neighborhood. Both schools had large enrollments of children from Asian, African, West Indian and Southern European backgrounds. The remaining school, Mineplain has predominantly working class White British students.

Each London school had approximately 250 students and one class on each grade. Two classes from each school participated in the study, except for Hortaine School where only one class participated. The total student population for the nine classes comprising the London sample was approximately 225 children.

Approximately 77% of the students returned consent forms. (See Appendix 3 for the parents' consent letter). The response rate ranged from 55% for Abbey Melton to 100% for Hortaine.

Since there was only one class on each grade in each London school, all children of the same age were assigned to the same class, irrespective of their reading level.

New York Schools

The superintendent of Community School District 51 permitted me to survey students at P.S.103, located in a middle-income housing project in central Brooklyn. The latest 1981 School Ethnic Census Report shows a wide mix of ethnic, racial and religious groups at this school (11% Asian, 19% Hispanic, 26% Black, and 43% Non-minority). In an interview with the Community Superintendent, he

indicated that while the school's students were predominantly middle-class, approximately 20% of the families were receiving some form of rent subsidy and that there was a similar percentage of children receiving either free or reduced price lunch.

There were seven classes in each of the fourth and fifth grades. After consulting with the principal of the school, three classes on each grade (180 children in all) were recruited for the survey because time limits prevented testing and interviewing all fourth and fifth graders. Since the classes were organized according to the students' reading level, top, middle and bottom level classes were recruited from each of these two grades.

One hundred seventy seven students (out of a possible 180) responded to the questionnaire. Fifty-six percent returned a consent form for the interviews (see the subsection, "Consent Forms" for more details) and 90 students (51%) were subsequently interviewed.

Most schools in the United States, including P.S. 103, primarily assign pupils to classes on the basis of the child's age and standardized test scores. We would, therefore, expect P.S. 103 to have highly stratified classes with respect to students' reading ability as well as race and ethnicity because of the strong positive relationships which exist among these variables; that is, schools which stream students according to reading ability would tend to have proportionately higher enrollments of White, middle-class, non-minority pupils in their upper reading level classes and proportionately higher enrollments of non-White, lower socio-economic status

minority students in their lower reading level classes (Jencks, 1979).

The table and discussion in Appendix 9 show that while there is a significant, positive relationship between reading level and parents' occupational status in the London and New York samples, there is virtually no relationship between reading level and race/ethnicity in both samples (Appendix 9 provides a possible explanation for this finding).

P.S. 103 assigned children to classes on the basis of reading test scores, and consequently, its classes were unbalanced with respect to parents' occupational status. However, the classes appeared to be fairly representative of the school's racial and ethnic population. Mabcor Park school and all London schools recruited their pupils from economically and racially segregated communities and each schools' population generally reflected their respective communities' demographic characteristics with respect to race, ethnicity and parents' occupational status.

The student body of P.S.103 appears to be representative of the lower middle-middle class New York population but it could not be considered truly representative of the city population at large, particularly because of its under-representation of low socio-economic status Black and Hispanic students. However, it would be exceedingly difficult to locate a much more statistically representative school in this city or for that matter, any city in this country or in England, because of skewed housing patterns and school policies which strongly encourage children to attend

neighborhood schools.

Several upper-middle class, suburban school districts were asked to participate in this survey, since the few upper-middle class Queens school districts refused to participate in the survey. Manhasset School District officials examined the questionnaire, read my proposal and allowed Mabcor Park School to participate in this survey.

Manhasset, Long Island is located Northeast of New York City proper and has a high concentration of affluent families. The student population is fairly homogeneous with respect to socio-economic status and cultural background (predominantly upper middle class and White). Twenty students were enrolled in each of the fourth and fifth grade classes which were enlisted for this study. The principal assured me that the classes were not organized according to children's reading level, so we can assume that the children in these classes did not have markedly different academic or social characteristics from children in the other classes on the grade. Thirty seven children (93% of the students in both classes) returned consent forms and responded to the questionnaire. Thirty-four children (85%) of the Manhasset children were interviewed.

Survey Methods

This section of the chapter will outline the specific procedures and supplementary instruments which were used prior to and in conjunction with, the questionnaire and interview schedule. It will also discuss some of the difficulties encountered during the survey administration

and describe strategies employed in order to cope with these problems.

A great deal of time, attention and planning figured into the pre-questionnaire-interview administrations. These preparations proved to be crucial to the success of the survey; the very high response rate is one piece of evidence of that success.

A very delicate chain exists between student, teacher, head teacher/principal, parent and researcher. If any one of these participants becomes hostile or apathetic to the research project, the other participants will likely acquire those same negative attitudes. It was crucial, therefore, to consult with all of these people about the aims and goals of the survey, to understand how each school operated so that disruptions would be minimized and to anticipate problems and remedy those problems before they affected other participants.

Initial Teacher Contacts

Each principal and head teacher was given a copy of the questionnaire and interview schedule during our first meeting. I explained the purposes and aims of the survey and answered any of their questions. During these meetings, arrangements were made to have a quiet, private room reserved for the interviews. The principals and head teachers were requested to select only those teachers who would likely be cooperative and enthusiastic participants in the survey. All the teachers in London and New York, save one teacher in New York, proved to be flexible and cooperative throughout the entire survey period. These

positive feelings appeared to be communicated to their students and to the students' parents.

Several meetings with the recruited teachers principals and head teachers occurred prior to the actual questionnaire administration. Class lists and reading scores/estimates were obtained from the teachers, office records, or the head teachers. The purposes and aims of the survey were also explained to the teachers. Copies of the questionnaire were shown to the teachers and their questions were answered. The teachers were also asked to reserve some class time so that I could introduce myself to the children and speak with them about the impending survey.

The classroom teachers were asked to devote more time to this study than any of the other participants. They had to remind their students to return the parent consent forms, collect these forms for me and, sometimes, readjust class activity schedules on the day of the questionnaire administration.

While these requests might not seem to be great impositions, researchers must be sensitive to the fact that most teachers are often required to devote small but nevertheless significant parts of the school day to many kinds of non-academic tasks. Extra tasks such as these might very well be resented. Resentment could become contagious to other participants in the survey.

Aware of the potential antipathy that might be caused by these requests, I suggested to the teachers that they take a non-active role in the questionnaire administration since I wanted the children to feel assured that their

answers would remain confidential. I further suggested that each teacher read a book or do some work while I administered the questionnaire. I believe that the resulting free time compensated teachers for their efforts and encouraged further cooperation.

Scheduling the questionnaire proved to be one of the most difficult aspects of the entire project. A 1983 pilot study demonstrated that the questionnaire administration would need approximately 45 minutes per class, including the time needed to read the directions and the time needed to collect the completed forms. This time actually varied somewhat, depending on the size of the class and the reading ability of the students. Based on this 45 minute estimate and the time needed to travel between schools, appointments were made and teachers were asked to have their students settled in their rooms within 10 minutes of the scheduled times.

We must remember that nine London classes and eight New York classes participated in this survey. Not only would all teachers in each city have to agree on a common day for the questionnaire administration, but I also had to work around a myriad of scheduled class programs such as teacher preparation periods, trips, tests, and other assorted commitments in order to find convenient times within the day when teacher and students would be available at the same time.

Although a mutually convenient day was agreed upon in both cities, it proved to be impossible for me to personally conduct all questionnaire administrations in London. As a result, the two Mineplain School teachers

agreed to administer the questionnaire to their classes and the Hortaine School teacher had only to administer the last few questions. However, I suspect that they did not supervise their students very carefully, since these three classes had higher numbers of incomplete responses than the other London classes. I personally administered all parts of the questionnaire to all the other classes in both London and New York.

At P.S. 103, 5-1, 4-7 (Intellectually Gifted Class) and 5-3 received the questionnaire in the lunch room at the same time. This was done because of scheduling considerations. The teachers stayed with their classes throughout the questionnaire administration. Children in classes 4-3, 4-5 and 5-6 each received their questionnaires in their respective classrooms. After completing the P.S. 103 questionnaire administrations, I went to the Mabcor Park school and separately gave the questionnaires to the fourth and fifth grade classes. In London, the two Freetown's classes and the two Abbey Melton classes were combined for the administration, while the other London classes were surveyed individually. In general, when classes were combined for the questionnaire administration, it became somewhat more difficult to distribute materials and answer questions than when children remained in their own classrooms and responded to the questionnaire in small groups.

Consent Forms

Approximately one week before the questionnaire administration day, I visited each London and New York

class and briefly told the students about the study and the importance of promptly returning the parent consent forms (See Appendix 3 for the parent consent form and Appendix 4 for the survey's initial introduction to the students). The teachers were asked to give extra copies of the consent form to absentees and children who lost the forms. Many children did not return the consent forms on the next day, as they were asked to do, so teachers had the extra burden of reminding children about the survey and the forms.

Consent forms were distributed to all London and Mabcor Park children. Both the District 51 superintendent and the principal of P.S. 103 initially said that a parents' consent form was not necessary since they did not feel that the questionnaire or the interview schedule contained particularly sensitive questions. They also felt that teachers would not be very willing to distribute and collect consent forms.

After the children finished the questionnaire, the principal decided that consent forms should have been given to the children, so these forms were distributed to all the children in the 6 classes. It should be stated that the teacher of the fourth grade class that had the poorest readers was very uncooperative and made very little attempt to collect the consent forms. As a result, only 7 out of the 27 children returned the forms and were interviewed. Therefore, the interview sample is positively skewed with respect to reading ability; that is, there is an over-representation of above average readers and an under-representation of below average

readers.

Questionnaire Administration

To provide confidentiality, several steps were taken. I obtained class rosters from each school. A four digit identification number was assigned to each student and these numbers were inserted next to each name on the roster and on a blank questionnaire. These numbers were later used to match interviews with questionnaire responses.

Before distributing the questionnaires to the students, a set of instructions was read (See Appendix 5). I believe that the previously discussed pre-administration meetings with children and teachers as well as these instructions helped the children feel comfortable and reassured, while at the same time, emphasized the seriousness and importance of the survey. Nevertheless, a small number of students still appeared to experience some unease with the test conditions and some questionnaire items.

I distributed the questionnaires to each student and read the instructions to the students. I slowly read each question to the class and gave the students time to fill in their answers. During the administration, some children did ask questions about some questionnaire items. If they still seemed puzzled after hearing my answers to their questions, I told them to try to answer the questions to the best of their ability or to leave the question blank if they really didn't know what to answer. Missing data were deemed preferable to inaccurate

information.

Some children did have difficulty answering some of the questions. The format of questions 9 and 11 and, to a lesser extent, question 19 seemed to be particularly confusing to some children. In addition, all open-ended questions which required some amount of writing seemed to pose difficulties for some of the slower students. For these questions, teachers often provided individual help to children and I encouraged children not to worry about spelling errors.

While our help and encouragement tended to mitigate the difficulties posed by many of the open-ended questions, a small percentage of the children still did not respond to these questions, suggesting that close-ended questions are more appropriate formats than open-ended questions. Open-ended items should only be used after it has been determined that close-ended questions could not elicit the kinds of information that the researcher needs.

After children finished answering all the questions, the questionnaires were collected. Before leaving the classroom, I told the students that they did very well and that I would return in several days to speak with them some more.

Student Interviews

The student interviews inevitably created some problems for the teachers since children would be entering and leaving their rooms throughout the day, often causing some disruptions in each class. There were no easy

solutions to this problem, but steps were taken to minimize the effects of these interruptions.

I suggested to each principal or head teacher that the interviews be conducted in a private, quiet room near the students' classroom. Children would, therefore, not have to spend too much time wandering the halls, and the interviews would also be finished more quickly. After each interview, the student received a hall pass stating the name of the next student I wanted to see. The students were asked to give this pass to that pupil. The teacher, therefore, did not have to stop teaching each time I needed to see a different student. I also asked each teacher whether there were any times during the day when interviews should be suspended due to lunch hours, tests, group lessons, or other activities requiring the presence of all the children. Teachers seemed to appreciate my concern for their work schedules and, therefore, became somewhat more tolerant of the ensuing interruptions. I read the instructions in Appendix 6 to each class before the individual interviews commenced.

The interview room usually contained a table and two chairs. I initially asked each student whether he objected to my taping the interview. While a few children seemed uncomfortable with the idea of having their interviews recorded, no one objected. For the hesitant children, I did explain that I needed the recorder because I wouldn't be able to remember what each student said and that it would be very difficult to write down what hundreds of children told me. This explanation seemed to satisfy these children. In any case, as children became

more engrossed in the interview, the recorder became less obtrusive.

The interview schedule (see Appendix 2) contained both structured and unstructured questions. All questions provided ample opportunities for children to volunteer as much information as they wished. At the end of each interview, I reminded the students not to discuss the interview with their classmates until after I finished speaking with everyone in their class. While it was quite likely that some children discussed their interviews with their classmates, most children's reactions and responses during the interview suggested that the vast majority did not seem to be aware of the specific questions which would be asked.

My general assessment of the questionnaire and interview administrations is that the children made excellent subjects. They were enthusiastic, articulate (especially so in England), fairly accurate and conscientious. The interviews might not have been the most cost-effective method for obtaining data from the children, but I am convinced that they did provide a great deal of highly reliable and valid data. Evidence of this reliability will be presented below.

RELIABILITY OF THE DATA

We were not able to perform formal reliability tests since the highest level of measurement employed in this study was ordinal data. However, both the questionnaire and interview schedule contained a few similar questions, so it is possible to cross-validate responses to these

questions and indirectly describe the reliability of some subjects' responses over a short period of time.

In general, subjects produced the highest number of congruent responses ("yes" or "no" on corresponding interview and questionnaire questions) for dichotomous choice items that asked the children to provide objective information about video item ownership. Eighty-eight percent of the respondents had congruent responses on the questionnaire and interview items which asked if they had a computer at home, 95% had congruent responses on the items concerning VCR ownership, and 86% had congruent responses on the ownership of video games items.

While these figures are quite high and indicate that most children gave consistent answers to these questions over a short period of time, we still wondered why some children gave inconsistent answers to such seemingly straightforward questions. Subjects with non-congruent responses were apparently unsure if they should say they owned a particular video item when it was broken or when it was situated in a sibling's room and used primarily by that sibling. With the video game questionnaire item, a small number of the children were uncertain about the definition of a video game, that is, they said "yes" if they had the small, hand held games. It is difficult to determine whether the questions were poorly worded (the questionnaire and interview schedule were pre-tested and seemed to be understood by nearly all children) or some children simply misinterpreted the questions.

Children interpreted some questions very literally, which, in one sense, suggests that they were very

conscientious subjects trying to answer the questions asked exactly. On the other hand, this literal approach might have produced incorrect data. For example, some children wanted to know if a bathroom counted as a room in the house. Others wanted to know if they could count a broken TV as one of the TVs in their house (the questionnaire administrators were instructed to answer, "no" to both questions). Many of these kinds of problems arose during either the pre-testing of the questionnaire or during the initial administration in London. Later administrations included more precise instructions about how to interpret these few troublesome questions). Such are the pitfalls of using questionnaires with young children--there is no way to assess their comprehension of the items while they are answering questions.

Some of the more problematic items were the questions about doing homework while watching TV. It is very surprising to see that 65% of the questionnaire children said that they "hardly ever" do homework while viewing TV and 96% of the interviewed children denied doing homework while viewing TV on the previous day. Twenty-one percent responded on the questionnaire that they watched TV while doing homework "some days" and only fourteen percent responded "almost always".

It is hard to believe that so many children actually refrained from watching TV while doing homework. But the high percentage of congruent responses as well as most interview responses showing that children's after-school routines defer play or TV watching until after homework is done, suggest that this might have been true. On the other

hand, the sensitive nature of the question may have influenced many of the children to consistently give the socially acceptable "yes" responses on the two survey instruments, rather than the truthfully "no" responses.

The items discussed above were close-ended questions which did not require children to reflect on their behavior patterns over an extended period of time. These types of items also seemed to be particularly reliable.

Children had much more trouble dealing with questions asking them to describe their past behavior or to estimate the amount of time they devoted to activities during a previous time period. For example, Chapter 4 will show that there was a large discrepancy between children's daily estimates of their video usage and the "actual" amount of time they reported viewing TV. Also, many children either could not or did not want to write down all the names of the programs they saw the previous day. As a result, the validity of these responses must be questioned.

The interviews minimized these kinds of measurement errors. The interviewer was able to rephrase questions, repeat respondents' answers if they were not clearly expressed, and encourage shy or forgetful subjects to remember the names of the programs that they watched and the amount of time they watched these programs. Perhaps most importantly, the interviews did not require children to do any writing, so nearly all questions were answered, in contrast to some questionnaire items left unanswered.

The interviewed children seemed to have a high degree of recall. Most of the children could remember nearly all

the programs they watched without much, if any, prompting. However, a fairly small percentage still had some difficulties remembering the amount of time they watched some programs.

Seventy-four percent of the interviewed children had no apparent problems with the question concerning their previous days' viewing schedule. Eleven percent had minor problems such as slight memory lapses. For example, children in this category might not have been able to recall the title of a program but could, nonetheless, describe the plot of the program and make it identifiable to the interviewer. Ten percent had moderate problems, such as being uncertain of some, but not all programs watched, and/or not knowing the amount of time they watched these programs. And six percent had serious problems whereby most, if not all, the information given to the interviewer could not be used.

While most children seemed to be fairly knowledgeable about their parents' occupations, some children either said they did not know what their parents did for a living or were not sure of this information. For these children, information was recorded as missing data. Unfortunately, there was no way to verify this information, since parents were not included in this study.

Overall, the children appeared to be truthful, conscientious subjects and able to give fairly reliable information. However, since other members of the children's families were not also interviewed, there is no way to corroborate the responses. Finally, it must be re-emphasized that all of the children's responses represent

perceptions of their behavior and that of other family members. Like all such perceptions, they may not be accurate accounts of actual behavior.

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLES

This study assumes that the demographic characteristics of each school's surrounding population were replicated within each school's population as well. We further assume that all families residing within each particular school's boundaries had school age children who attended the neighborhood school. While these assumptions are valid for a significant number of schools and communities, they cannot be unqualifiedly applied to all schools and communities in the New York and London samples.

The schools participating in this study were specifically selected because important school demographic characteristics, such as socio-economic status, race and ethnicity, closely resembled similar census data of the surrounding communities. But, it was difficult to determine how many children from each of these communities attended non-public schools and the extent to which these non-public school children differed from the students who attended the public schools participating in this study. In addition, small percentages of the New York and London samples were not living in their respective school zones. The assumption of representativeness must, therefore, be somewhat cautiously applied to this study's sample of schools and children.

School Sample Characteristics

The percentage of males for the New York and London sample is 48% and 49%, respectively. The mean family size is 3.5 and 3.6 members per household, respectively. Both sets of figures appear to be very close to each city's corresponding census figures.

Respondents' Race and Ethnic Affiliation

Race and ethnic affiliation are important variables in this study, insofar as English language fluency, social isolation, broadcast programming and other factors impact on children's television program choices and video usage in general.

London and New York local education authorities did not want children to be asked about their ethnic and racial background on the questionnaire. However, they did allow me to ask those children who were interviewed whether either of their parents spoke another language at home and as a follow-up, where their parents were born. On the basis of these responses and children's physical characteristics, interviewed children were classified into one of several racial/ethnic categories. In addition, children who were not interviewed but who had Hispanic or Asian surnames were also classified as either Hispanic or Other, Non-English speakers, respectively (See section on interviewing techniques).

Table 2.1 shows the demographic composition of the sample by city of residence, in terms of race, ethnicity and cultural background.(1)

TABLE 2.1: THE DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS BY
RACE-ETHNICITY BY CITY OF RESIDENCE

<u>RACE- ETHNICITY</u>	<u>NEW YORK</u>	<u>LONDON</u>
White-English Speaking	34%	65%
Black-English Speaking	16	4
Hispanic	14	0
Other Non-English Speaking	21	27
Black-Non-English Speaking	1	3
Hispanic Surnamed (a)	5	0
Asian Surnamed (a)	8	0
N =	100% (166)	100% (176)

(a) These figures include Hispanic or Asian surnamed children who were not interviewed. The Hispanic and Asian surnamed children will be collapsed into the Hispanic and Other, Non-English speaking categories, respectively.

The New York sample closely resembles the ethnic, racial and sexual composition of New York City, as a whole, according to the 1980 Census report. That report found that 55% of the New York City population was White, 25% was Black and 20% was Hispanic, while the figures in Table 2.1 show that 55% of the sample is White, 17% is Black and 19% is Hispanic. The 1981 Census data for the London population published by the Greater London Council shows that 7.9% of the Inner London population was West Indian or Guyanese, and 5% was Indian, Pakistani or Bangladeshi.(2) Information from The New York Times, May 14,1986, indicates that "4 percent of the British population is Non-White and in some metropolitan areas such as London it is as high as 13 percent." The figures in Table 2.1 show that 7% of the London sample is Black and 6% is Asian. The Asian children were coded into the Other Non-English speaking category.

The New York sample's racial and ethnic distribution reflects the fact that the two schools in this sample

happened to have predominantly middle class respondents, resulting in a lower representation of Blacks and Hispanics than would be found in the city as a whole. While the five London schools were located in predominantly White areas, the London sample is still more representative of the racial and economic diversity of its city as a whole than is the New York sample (see the relevant section of this chapter which describes how the schools were recruited for the sample).

Parents' Occupational Status

Extensive research shows that there are positive correlations between educational level, income level and social status (Jencks, 1979). Economic considerations, therefore, presumably play some part in a parent's decision to purchase video appliances and that factors associated with parents' educational and social status might also affect parental and children's attitudes towards the media in terms of the ownership and usage of television sets and VCRs.

Ideally, in order to test these hypotheses, we would first gather reliable data about parents' income and educational levels. But in practical terms, few children would know how much money their parents earned and most would not be expected to know how much education their parents completed. Since we could not obtain this information directly from the respondents' parents, we decided to ask children to describe their parents' jobs. This information was coded into one of four occupational status categories; the categories are somewhat crude, but

nevertheless valid, reliable and useful indicators of parents' occupational status (See the preceding section on interviewing techniques).

The New York and London local education authorities would not allow me to ask for this information on the questionnaires, due to the sensitive nature of the information. However, the New York schools allowed me to ask interviewed children for this information, while the London Authority allowed each school's head teacher to decide whether I could ask children for this information.

Hortaine, Yarbine, and Mineplain children were, consequently, directly asked about their parents' occupations. The head teacher of Abbey Melton was able to tell me about most, but not all, children's parents' occupations. The head teacher at Freetown's would neither supply this information nor allow me to ask children about their parents' occupations. For this reason, Freetown's students are not included in any tables involving occupational status, although we should bear in mind that because most of the Freetown's students lived in the upper-middle class borough of Hampstead, most parents probably had white collar, skilled professional occupations.

Each of the four occupational status categories take into account the level of skills and education generally required for each type of job mentioned by respondents. The manual unskilled category included jobs that did not require at least the equivalent of a high school education and did not require many skills. The manual skilled category included jobs that did require fairly specific

manual skills and a high school education but less than a Bachelor of Arts degree. The white collar, skilled professional category included predominantly non-manual jobs and some college education or technical training, but not a B.A. degree. And finally, the white collar, skilled professional category included predominantly non-manual jobs that required a B.A. degree.

We acknowledge that these categories are not mutually exclusive; that some jobs could have some characteristics applicable to two adjacent categories. For these few situations, colleagues were asked to help resolve these coding problems. Where both parents worked, the highest parents' occupational status was assigned to each respondent.

Table 2.2 shows the distribution of parents' occupational status by city of residence.(3) The figures in this table show that 45% of the New York sample came from white-collar skilled professional families, 26% coming from white collar semi-skilled families, 15% coming from manual skilled families, and 15% from manual unskilled families. Nearly half of the New York sample were in the white-collar skilled professional group, while only 30% of the sample were in the two manual categories. The London sample, on the other hand, is quite evenly divided among the four occupational status groups, with each category containing approximately 25% of the sample.

TABLE 2.2: THE DISTRIBUTION OF PARENTS' OCCUPATIONAL STATUS BY CITY OF RESIDENCE (excluding Freetown's-London)

<u>OCCUPATIONAL STATUS</u>	<u>NEW YORK</u>	<u>LONDON</u>
MANUAL UNSKILLED	15%	26%
MANUAL SKILLED	15	22
WHITE COLLAR SEMI-SKILLED	26	27
WHITE COLLAR SKILLED PROF	45	25
N =	100% (124)	100% (111)

The Relation of Occupational Status and Ethnicity

As seen in Tables 2.1 and 2.2 that both the New York and London children came from diverse ethnic and social backgrounds and the samples seem to represent the populations from which they were drawn. The next table presented-Table 2.3-summarizes the ethnic and occupational groups in both cities. London and New York children fell into similar groups according to social and economic status. The upper occupational statuses had a disproportionately high percentage of White, English speakers and the lower statuses had a disproportionately high percentage of Blacks and Other ethnic minority groups. These data reinforce the conclusions of many demographic studies showing that Whites are more likely to have higher occupational status and income than do members of non-White minority groups (Jencks, 1979). Table 2.3 supports these findings as well.

TABLE 2.3: PARENTS' OCCUPATIONAL STATUS BY ETHNIC AND RACIAL GROUP BY CITY OF RESIDENCE (a)

<u>ETHNIC AND RACIAL GROUP</u>	<u>NEW YORK</u>				<u>LONDON</u>			
	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>
<u>OCCUP. STATUS</u>								
MANUAL UNSKILLED	10%	21%	30%	7%	23%	80%	0%	25%
MANUAL SKILLED	6	21	25	17	20	20	0	25
WHITE COLLAR SEMI-SKILLED	16	29	20	45	24	0	0	40
WHITE COLLAR SKILLED PROF.	69	29	25	31	33	0	0	16
N =	100% (51)	100% (24)	100% (20)	100% (29)	100% (70)	100% (5)	100% (0)	100% (34)
CRAMER'S V =	.274				.219			

(a) 1=White English speakers 3=Hispanic
 2=Black English speakers 4=Other Non-English Speakers

Table 2.3 shows that for both the New York and London samples, the White-English speaking parents tend to have the highest status occupations, while Black and Hispanic minorities tend to have the lowest status occupations. Other Non-English ethnic groups tend to have White collar, semi-skilled positions. For each ethnic group category, percentages for the London and New York samples are not alike. However, the ordinal rankings of ethnic and racial groups regarding occupational status are, with few exceptions, alike for the two samples.

Reading across the New York, White collar skilled professional row, we see 69% of the White English speakers have white collar professional occupations, but only 29% of the Blacks, 25% of the Hispanics and 31% of the Other Non-English speakers have white collar jobs. New York White English speakers are more than twice as likely to

hold skilled professional jobs as members of the three other ethnic groups! The proportion of New York White majority and Other Non-English speaking parents who are either skilled or semi-skilled white collar was very similar (85% as compared with 76%, respectively), but the proportional differences between White majority and Black parents (27%) and White majority parents and Hispanics (40%) were quite large.

The London sample did not appear to be as ethnically stratified as the New York sample, since the London occupational status groups appear to be less skewed with regard to ethnicity than are the New York occupational status groups. Nevertheless, 33% of the London White English speakers had white collar skilled occupations as compared to only 16% of the Other non-English category. All Black Londoners in the sample were in the lowest status, manual occupations, although the small number of Blacks in the sample might be producing unreliable results.

As we saw in the New York sample, the proportion of the London White majority and Other Non-English speaking parents who are either skilled or semi-skilled white collar is nearly identical (57% as compared with 56%, respectively), but all the Blacks in the London sample are in the two lowest status, manual occupational categories. Thus, for both the London and New York samples, race appears to explain a greater part of the variance of parent's occupational status than does ethnic background.

The preceding sections have shown that the London and New York samples are closely matched in terms of family

size, sex, and age. These similarities suggest that the schools in London and New York were cross-matched fairly well. The two samples are less closely matched in terms of parents' occupational status and ethnic background, but these dissimilarities are most likely due to the non-random sampling of schools and each city's unique demographic structure rather than sampling errors.

CHAPTER THREE

OWNERSHIP OF VIDEO HARDWARE AND SOFTWARE IN LONDON AND NEW YORK

Social and Economic Correlates of Video Hardware and Software Ownership

Children's access to and use of video devices may be seen as part of a larger picture in which video items often become important tools by which children gain information and develop their cognitive, creative and emotional potential (Greenfield, 1983; Noble, 1975). If some children lack access to these video items, particularly because of their parents' lower economic and social status, then there could be a widening of the already large academic achievement gap between rich and poor children.

Video Item Ownership By City of Residence

Each video item has its own set of latent and manifest functions. The uses-gratifications approach would suggest that parents purchase items because they believe that individual members of their family have specific needs which could be gratified by the specific item. For example, an item might provide information or entertainment for a child. A child might be inclined to use the item instead of demanding attention from a sibling or parent. Ownership of the item might provide the parent with high amounts of status within the community. Since we were not able to ask parents why they purchased any video item, we can only assume that ownership is indicative of some form of need gratification, but we

cannot state exactly what those needs might be.

Table 3.1 shows the percentage of children in London and New York who own the most popular forms of home video items, i.e. VCRs, computer/video games, computers, a television in the respondent's bedroom and cable TV hook-ups (cable TV does not yet exist in England).

TABLE 3.1: THE PERCENTAGE OF HOUSEHOLDS THAT HAVE VCRS, COMPUTER/VIDEO GAMES, COMPUTERS, A TELEVISION IN THE RESPONDENTS' BEDROOM, A TELEVISION IN THE PARENTS' BEDROOM, 2 OR MORE TELEVISION SETS AND CABLE TV BY CITY OF RESIDENCE

<u>HARDWARE</u>	<u>NEW YORK</u>	<u>LONDON</u>
VCR	52%(223)	53%(178)
COMPUTER/VIDEO GAMES	73(221)	38(178)
COMPUTER	37(218)	26(162)
TV IN RESPONDENTS' BEDROOM	53(215)	14(164)
TV IN PARENTS' BEDROOM	60(215)	29(164)
2 OR MORE HOUSEHOLD TVS	88(215)	59(164)
CABLE TV	61(211)	Not Applicable
MEAN NUMBER OF TVS PER HOUSEHOLD	2.65(216)	1.81(165)

Table 3.1 shows that higher percentages of New York households own computer/video games, computers and television sets in the respondents' and parents' bedrooms and multiple television sets than do London children but that VCR ownership is the same in the two cities. The New York-London percentage differences range from a low of 11% for computer ownership to a high of 39% for households that have a television in the respondents' bedrooms. While virtually all households in New York and London own

at least one television, the average New York family in this sample was much more likely to own two or more television sets than was the average London family.

This table also shows that many of the multiple television households place television sets in the respondents' and/or parents' bedrooms. Because New York households have so many more television sets than do London households, we should not be surprised to find that New York children are nearly four times more likely to have a bedroom television than are London children and New York parents are twice as likely to have a bedroom television than are London parents. We will see in Chapter 8 that bedroom television ownership and usage have a significant impact on the quantity and quality of intra-familial interactions.

While Britain's lower standard of living, compared to that of the United States, can serve as a plausible explanation for the London respondents' relatively low rate of video ownership, this same economic explanation would not explain the nearly identical percentages of New York and London families who own VCRs (52% and 53%, respectively. (The 1982 median household income for the Southeast region in England, including London, was 210 Pounds per week or approximately \$12,370 per year, (1) based on one pound = \$1.30, while in New York City, the 1979 median weekly salary was \$13,854.(2) We can assume that if we account for inflation, this latter figure would be greater in 1982). We will see that cultural attitudes towards video media plays an important role in determining whether or not parents decide to purchase any particular

type of video item.

We might add that the London and New York VCR figures are considerably higher than the video industry's estimates of 25% for the population at large.(3) One probable explanation for this difference is that this sample is more representative of families with young children than it is of the general population. Bezzini and Desmond (1983) suggests that families with school age children are much more likely to have cable TV and are also more likely to own a greater number of video devices, including VCRs, than are other segments of society.

The figures in Table 3.1 illustrated the percentage of families in the two samples who owned individual video items, but these figures do not differentiate between families who own few or many of these items.

Table 3.2 shows the percentage of the New York and London samples who owned different quantities of video related items mentioned in Table 3.1.

TABLE 3.2: NUMBER OF VIDEO RELATED ITEMS OWNED BY CITY OF RESIDENCE

	<u>NEW YORK</u>	<u>LONDON</u>
<u>NUMBER OF VIDEO ITEMS (a)</u>		
5 ITEMS	14%	3%
4 ITEMS	24	11
3 ITEMS	26	18
2 ITEMS	24	31
1 ITEM	10	20
0 ITEMS (b)	2	18
	100% (211)	100% (148)

(a) VIDEO RELATED ITEMS INCLUDE:

1= TWO OR MORE TV SETS	4= COMPUTER
2= VCR	5= TV IN RESPONDENT'S BEDROOM
3= VIDEO/COMPUTER GAMES	

(b) We are assuming that these households owned only one television.

The New York and London video item distributions in Table 3.2 provide further evidence that the New York families owned significantly more video items than did the London families. Fourteen percent of the New Yorkers owned 5 video items and 24% owned four video items, as compared with only 3% and 11%, respectively, of the London sample. Conversely, only 2% of the New Yorkers own none of the listed video items and 10% own one item, as compared with 18% and 20%, respectively, of the London sample.

This study cannot test all the myriad hypotheses which could possibly explain why these video ownership differences exist. But the following sections will attempt to explore how macro-structural factors, such as

economic, social and cultural statuses, affect ownership and consequent usage of video items.

Occupational Status and Video Ownership

Questions involving video item ownership can be seen as part of a much larger issue concerning children's access to video hardware and software and the consequent access to the information provided by these items. (We will see in Chapter 5 that academic achievement is associated with computer ownership. No one has yet tried to determine if ownership of computers and other video items has long term effects on academic achievement, since these items are still too new). If children are differentially deprived of certain video items, principally because of economic, social and/or cultural constraints, then there is a danger that these same children might also be deprived of critical educational and emotional supports as well. Social factors related to these and other variables "may play on the uses and gratifications system...Social conditions may affect the availability ...of so called functional alternatives to media sources of satisfaction" (Blumler, 1985:56-57).

Table 3.3 shows the percentage of children who own the video items listed in Table 3.1 as well as cable TV hook-ups (which are presently unavailable in London), by the respondents' city of residence and parents' occupational status.

TABLE 3.3: PERCENTAGE OF HOUSEHOLDS THAT OWN CABLE TV, A VCR, A COMPUTER, COMPUTER/VIDEO GAMES, A TV IN THE RESPONDENT'S BEDROOM, A TV IN THE PARENT'S BEDROOM AND 2 OR MORE HOUSEHOLD TVS BY CITY OF RESIDENCE AND PARENTS' OCCUPATIONAL STATUS

		<u>NEW YORK</u>				<u>LONDON</u>			
<u>OCCUPATIONAL STATUS</u>	<u>(a)</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>
<u>VIDEO ITEMS</u>									
V C R		22%	50%	59%	59%	52%	96%	63%	36%
		(18)	(18)	(32)	(56)	(29)	(24)	(30)	(28)
	GAMMA	.300				-.255			
COMPUTER		35	28	28	38	13	13	21	48
		(17)	(18)	(32)	(56)	(23)	(23)	(29)	(27)
	GAMMA	.099				.507			
COMPUTER/VIDEO GAMES		59	83	78	70	24	58	43	50
		(17)	(18)	(32)	(56)	(29)	(24)	(30)	(28)
	GAMMA	-.018				.219			
TV IN RESPONDENT'S BEDROOM		67	47	47	44	18	19	23	8
		(15)	(17)	(30)	(55)	(28)	(21)	(30)	(26)
	GAMMA	-.178				-.152			
TV IN PARENT'S BEDROOM		60	47	53	69	29	24	17	23
		(15)	(17)	(30)	(55)	(28)	(21)	(30)	(26)
	GAMMA	.225				-.115			
2 OR MORE TVS		87	77	83	98	64	52	63	58
		(15)	(17)	(30)	(55)	(28)	(21)	(30)	(73)
	GAMMA	.535				-.036			
CABLE TV		33	47	55	40	Not Applicable			
		(15)	(17)	(29)	(55)				
	GAMMA	.037							

(a) 1=MANUAL UNSKILLED
2=MANUAL SKILLED

3=WHITE COLLAR-SEMI SKILLED
4=WHITE COLLAR SKILLED PROFESSIONAL

Since we have seen in the previous section that Londoners own substantially fewer video items than do New Yorkers, we would expect Table 3.3 to show correspondingly smaller video ownership percentage figures in each of the London occupational categories as compared to each of the same New York occupational categories. And if the hypothesis concerning the positive relationship between

occupational status and ownership of video items is true, we would also expect to see a consistent pattern of ownership percentage increases as occupational status increases, for both the New York and London samples.

As to the first of these expectations, we generally do find that, with two exceptions, each of the London occupational categories has substantially smaller percentages of video ownership than their corresponding New York categories.

The column figures for VCR owners show that in the two lowest London occupational statuses (categories 1 and 2), the percentage of respondents who own VCRs is 30 and 46 percentage points higher than in the same two status categories in New York. And the third highest London occupational status also has slightly more respondents (4%) who own a VCR than do New Yorkers in this same category.

New Yorkers of all occupational statuses except the highest are more likely to own computers than their London counterparts. The percentage of computer owners in the highest London occupational status (category 4) is 10 percentage points higher than in this same category of New Yorkers.

The findings on VCRs and computers suggest that the lower occupational statuses in London are more apt to own a VCR than their New York counterparts (this finding is particularly true for the London manual skilled workers, category 2, where 96% of the families in this group owned a VCR), while the upper occupational status groups in London are more apt to own computers than their

counterparts in New York. Except for these two video item categories, New Yorkers consistently own more video items than do Londoners of the same occupational status.

People with high occupational status are more likely to own most video items than are people with low occupational status, especially in New York. Most video item categories in New York show at least some positive connection between occupational status and ownership of hardware. If we compare lowest and highest New York occupational categories for each video category, we do see that the white collar skilled professional group has fairly consistent tendencies to own higher percentages of video items than the manual unskilled group, although we must bear in mind that many of the measures of association are not significant. In the case of New York VCR ownership, the percentage increase from the lowest to the highest occupational category is quite substantial.

The only exception to these patterns can be found in the category of New York respondents who have a television in their bedroom, where we see that there are approximately 20% more children of manual unskilled parents who have television sets in their bedrooms than children of parents in higher occupations. This finding is particularly interesting since respondents in the same manual unskilled category do not seem to own as many television sets as students in the higher occupational categories (98% of the white collar professional group own two or more TVs as opposed to 87% of the manual unskilled category). These figures show that while a higher percentage of New York high occupational status families

tend to own more than two television sets than do families in the lower occupational groups, the higher occupational groups are not as likely as the lower occupational groups to place these television sets in their children's bedrooms. Rather, the TV in parents' room partial table shows that of those parents who placed an extra television in their own rooms, the proportion of New York white collar skilled professional parents who did so was nine percentage points greater than among the manual unskilled parents. (See Chapter 8 for a discussion of the impact of parents' room television sets on children's intra-familial interactions).

In London, the highest occupational status group does have substantially more computer/video games and computers (50% and 48%, respectively), than the lowest occupational status groups, (24% and 13%, respectively).

Yet, for the four other video categories, there are unexpected lower percentages of ownership in the highest occupational status group than in the lowest occupational status group. Comparing the highest and lowest London occupational categories, the manual unskilled group has six percentage points fewer respondents who own two or more television sets, 16 points fewer respondents who own VCRs, 10 points fewer respondents who have a TV in their bedrooms and six points fewer parents who have a bedroom television, than do the white collar, skilled professionals. While not all of these percentage differences are very large or significant, they do suggest that other factors besides occupational status and disposable income (such as, a parent's social and cultural

attitudes towards child rearing and video usage) could influence a parent's decision to purchase particular video items.

Occupational status appears to have very different effects on ownership of most video items, depending on the respondents' city of residence. Only the computer and respondents' bedroom television categories have similar patterns of ownership by occupational status in both New York and London. Computers appear to be much more common among the higher occupational status respondents in both New York and London while television sets in the respondents' bedrooms seem to be more common among the lower occupational status groups.

The relative paucity of computers among the lower occupational status group families might be cause for concern since there appears to be a positive relationship between computer ownership and reading ability (see Chapter 6). Children of lower occupational status parents might be experiencing serious educational handicaps because they do not have computers in their homes.

But, the different cultural and social characteristics of each city, independent of occupational status, also seem to influence a parent's decision to purchase specific types of video items. We see in New York, for example, that higher occupational status households tended to own more television sets than the lower occupational status households, but smaller percentages of these high status families had televisions in children's bedrooms than did the lower occupational status families.

Conversely, in London, lower occupational status households tended to own more television sets and also tended to put more television sets in their children's bedrooms than higher occupational status households.

Ethnicity and Video Ownership

We will see in Chapter 4 that ethnic and cultural characteristics are associated with video usage. We will show, for example, that American Blacks and Hispanics watch more television than do Whites (Greenberg and Dervin, 1968) and Blacks generally have more favorable attitudes towards television than do Whites (Bower, 1970).

This section will discuss whether ethnicity and race are related to video ownership. Two sub-issues will be commented upon. We will first see that, in general, fewer video items were owned in families where English is not the native language of one or both parents, than in families where English was the native language because non-English speakers do not have the requisite command of English in order to utilize the video items. Secondly, we will see that American Blacks and Hispanics, in spite of their low economic status, are more likely than Whites to own certain kinds of video hardware and software items in general, and television sets in particular.

Table 3.4 shows the percentage of New York and London ethnic groups who own common household video items.

TABLE 3.4: PERCENTAGE OF CHILDREN WHO OWN CABLE TV, A VCR, A COMPUTER, COMPUTER/VIDEO GAMES, A TV IN THEIR BEDROOM AND TWO OR MORE HOUSEHOLD TV SETS BY CITY OF RESIDENCE AND ETHNIC GROUP AFFILIATION

<u>ETHNIC GROUP (a)</u>	<u>NEW YORK</u>				<u>LONDON</u>		
	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>4 (b)</u>
<u>VIDEO ITEMS</u>							
CABLE TV	61% (56)	63% (24)	69% (29)	49% (47)	Not Applicable		
CRAMER'S V	.147						
VCR	55% (56)	35% (26)	30% (33)	61% (49)	51% (115)	100% (7)	50% (54)
CRAMER'S V	.254				.221		
COMPUTER	45 (56)	23 (26)	30 (33)	27 (48)	30% (102)	33% (6)	17% (54)
CRAMER'S V	.183				.173		
COMPUTER/VIDEO GAMES	73 (56)	65 (26)	85 (33)	65 (48)	42 (115)	14 (7)	33 (54)
CRAMER'S V	.168				.133		
TV IN R's BEDROOM	34 (56)	60 (25)	76 (29)	36 (47)	15 (105)	17 (6)	10 (51)
CRAMER'S V	.333				.153		
2 OR MORE TVs	96 (56)	88 (25)	90 (29)	75 (47)	62 (106)	67 (6)	49 (51)
CRAMER'S V	.269				.123		

(a) 1=White English speakers 3=Hispanic
 2=Black English speakers 4=Other Non-English speakers

(b) The London Hispanic category has been collapsed into the Other, Non-English speaking category since there are only three Hispanic respondents in London.

The data in Table 3.4 demonstrate that ownership of many types of video hardware and software is related to ethnicity. In particular, Non-English speakers were less likely to own many kinds of video items than were White English speakers.

If we compare video ownership percentage differences between White English speakers and Other Non-English

speakers for New York and London, we do see a very consistent pattern of differences emerging from the data. Ownership of cable TV, computer, computer/video games, television in the respondents' bedroom (in London) and two or more household television sets was higher among White English speakers than among the Other Non-English speakers. Percentage differences between these two ethnic groups ranged from a low of eight percentage points in the New York computer/video game category to a high of 21 points in the category of New Yorkers with two or more television sets. In fact, for most, but not all, of the video item categories, the Other Non-English speakers had the smallest percentage of video ownership than all other ethnic groups in the New York and London samples.

However, the association between video item ownership ethnicity or race may be due to socio-economic status, since as seen in Table 2.3, White English speakers are much more likely to have high-status, white collar occupations (and presumably higher incomes) than Other Non-English speakers, as well as Blacks and Hispanics.

If socio-economic status explains video ownership, then we would expect to find that significantly larger percentages of high occupational status White English speakers own all categories of video hardware than do low status Blacks and Hispanics. The figures in Table 3.4 show that higher percentages of White English speakers than Blacks and Hispanics did own specific video items, but for some other items, Blacks and Hispanics were more likely to be owners than were White English speakers. As we will see with the VCR category, an economic theory of

video item ownership does not account for specific attitudes which are held by ethnic/racial groups towards ownership and usage of specific video items (Greenberg, 1976; Comstock and Cobbey, 1978). These attitudes, and the perceived needs which are related to these attitudes, once identified, could help explain why higher percentages than might normally be expected, of low occupational status, low income ethnic/racial groups, owned certain video items than respondents in high occupational status, high income ethnic/racial groups.

In Table 3.4, among the New York Blacks, Hispanics and White English speakers who owned VCRs, the proportion of Black owners was 20 percentage points less than among Whites and the proportion of Hispanic owners was 25 points less than among Whites. Among those with a computer, the proportion of Black owners was 22 points less than among Whites and the proportion of Hispanic owners was 15 points less than among Whites. Among owners of two or more television sets, the proportion of Black and Hispanic owners was eight and six points less, respectively, than among Whites. Conversely, the proportion of Black and Hispanic owners of bedroom TVs was 26 and 42 percentage points greater, respectively, than among Whites and the proportion of Hispanic computer/video game owners was 12 points higher than among Whites.

Clearly, occupational/income status does not account for the very high percentage of Blacks and Hispanics who owned bedroom television sets and the high percentage of Hispanics who owned computer/video games. Equally as clear, the assumedly favorable attitudes of Blacks towards

television and their high levels of television usage would not explain why Blacks also did not have high ownership levels of household television sets and VCRs, as the theory stated at the outset of this section would imply. Unfortunately, the data in this study do not identify the apparently latent needs, attitudes and motives which could explain why members of some ethnic/racial groups are more likely to purchase specific video items, than are members of other groups.

While the figures in Table 3.3 showed that occupational/economic status is related to ownership of some video items, bilingual television programming and cultural attitudes towards video media might also be related to video ownership in general and VCRs in particular. The New York and London VCR figures in Table 3.4 show that Other Non-English speakers and White English speakers owned very similar percentages of VCRs, and all the London Blacks owned VCRs, despite their high cost. We see that 61% of the New York Other Non-English speakers as compared with 55% of the White English speakers owned VCRs while 50% of the London Other Non-English speakers owned VCRs as compared to 51% of the London White English speakers and 100% of the London Blacks.

If economics appears to explain why higher percentages of White English speakers owned most types of video items, why is this theory inapplicable for the VCR category?

A macro-cultural explanation of media ownership would suggest that since there is no regular television programming in any language but English (and Spanish in

New York), the Other Non-English groups cannot enjoy regular television broadcasting as do English speakers and New York Hispanics. As a result, a fairly large number of Other Non-English respondents reported in the interviews that their parents bought VCRs in order to rent tapes in their native languages. Many non-English speaking children also reported that they watch these foreign language tapes with their parents (see Chapter 8 for a more detailed discussion). Fairly few New York Hispanics, as contrasted with the Other Non-English speakers, apparently felt the need to purchase VCRs as a source of native language entertainment, since Hispanics do have access to daily Spanish programming on the UHF frequencies. For New York Hispanics, Spanish VCR tapes would not be seen as a particularly important entertainment need, as it would for Other Non-English speakers who do not have access to broadcast programming in their native language.

The figures in Table 3.4 seem to indicate that Other Non-English speakers are more likely to purchase VCRs than other video items because VCRs fill important and specific leisure time needs that broadcast television and other types of video items obviously do not meet. This inference is strengthened when we notice that when a locality, such as New York, provides regular broadcast programming for its non-English speaking, Hispanic population, the proportion of Hispanics who owned a VCR was 31 percentage points less than among the other, Non-English speakers. In order to ascertain whether these inferences are indeed true, we would have to conduct

follow-up interviews with parents and ask them why they have or have not decided to buy VCRs.

We began this section by asking if ethnicity is related to video ownership. We can say that it is if we compare video ownership for the White English speakers and other ethnic group members. For these groups, in London and New York, the language (and economic) component of ethnicity seems to explain why higher percentages of White English speakers consistently owned more kinds of video items than did members of the Other Non-English speaking group. Since most items assume a knowledge of English and are also fairly expensive, Non-English speakers might not feel that audio-visual items are functionally related to their needs.

On the other hand, for New York Blacks, Hispanics and White English speakers, the cultural component of ethnicity might be associated with ownership of specific video items, such as VCRs, television sets in the respondents' bedrooms, computers and, to a lesser degree, multiple television sets. That is, other needs, attitudes and motives that are related to academic aspirations, child-rearing behavior and family structure might be associated with ethnicity and might, consequently, have some effects on video ownership as well.

SUMMARY

The macro-structural/cultural component of the uses-gratifications perspective showed how factors associated with city of residence, parents' occupational status, race and ethnicity influence parents' decisions to purchase

specific video items. This chapter has shown that significantly higher percentages of New York families owned nearly every category of video item (except for VCRs) than did London families within the same occupational status and ethnic group. While we were not able to rule out the disparate standards of living of these two cities as an explanation for this difference, we were inclined to minimize this argument since nearly identical percentages of both samples did own fairly expensive VCRs.

When we examined the effects of parents' occupational status on video ownership, we saw that in New York, there appeared to be a reasonably strong, positive relationship between occupational status and video ownership. For most, but not all, video items, high occupational status groups tended to be more likely to own most video items than members of low occupational status groups.

In London, there appeared to be a rather ambiguous relationship between occupational status and video ownership. Some video categories recorded high ownership percentages for high occupational status families while other video categories recorded low ownership levels for high occupational status families.

And finally, we saw that the language component of ethnicity appeared to be related to video ownership. Since most video items require users to understand English, we inferred that Non-English speakers were not particularly motivated to purchase these items because they could not effectively use them. Non-English speakers did tend to favor VCRs and foreign language video tapes

over television sets, especially where bilingual programming did not exist. Ethnic groups are likely to purchase those video items which are functionally related to, and able to gratify, their needs.

We also saw that cultural group differences, irrespective of English language dominance, could also influence parents' decisions to purchase specific video items. Much higher percentages of New York Blacks and Hispanics placed television sets in their children's bedrooms, while much lower percentages of Blacks and Hispanics owned computers than did White English speakers. Family structure and educational attitudes of the various ethnic groups might have accounted for these differences.

CHAPTER FOUR
CORRELATES OF CHILDREN'S TELEVISION VIEWING TIME

Two central issues will be discussed in this chapter: First, the amount of time children watch television. Second, whether micro-motivational factors associated with a child's stage of cognitive and emotional development and macro-structural factors, such as social, environmental and economic characteristics, affect the amount of time children watch television.

We will see that the amount of time children spend watching television on any given day varies from 85 minutes to 188 minutes, depending on the day of the week, weather conditions, television programming, amount of homework and other environmental factors. We will also see that traditional methods for obtaining research data from children, in particular, their reports of viewing times on self-administered questionnaires, produce fairly unstable and unreliable information.

Mean Television Viewing Times

Three sets of mean television viewing times presented in Table 4.1 have been computed from three different sources. The first set was derived from item 5 on the questionnaire which asked children to estimate the number of hours they usually watch television on school days. The second set of figures was derived from questionnaire items 42 and 43. These questions asked the children to list each television program and each VCR tape they had seen during the previous day and evening. (The second set

of figures describe the mean viewing times only of those children who claimed to watch TV). The third set of figures was computed from interview responses. Children were asked to recall not only all the television programs and VCR tapes they saw during the previous day and evening, but also the number of minutes they viewed each program. These interview figures are assumed to be more accurate indicators of children's mean television and VCR viewing times than those figures which were obtained from the questionnaire responses. (See the notes at the end of Appendix 7 for the procedures used to collect data on television and VCR viewing times.)

Table 4.1 shows the mean total television and VCR viewing times for the London and New York samples based upon both questionnaire and interview responses. Since VCRs are "merely extensions of ... and related to broadcast television" (Williams et al., 1985:242), VCR viewing figures will usually be combined with broadcast viewing figures.

TABLE 4.1: MEAN TELEVISION AND VCR VIEWING TIMES BY CITY
OF RESIDENCE-DATA BASED ON QUESTIONNAIRE AND
INTERVIEW DATA QUESTIONNAIRE (a)

	<u>NEW YORK</u>	<u>LONDON</u>
MEAN TELEVISION VIEWING TIME BASED ON RESPONDENTS' SELF- ESTIMATE (QUESTION 5)	241 MIN. N= (212)	205 MIN. (160)
MEAN TELEVISION VIEWING TIME OF TV VIEWERS (BASED ON QUESTIONNAIRE VIEWING LISTS- QUESTION 42) (1)	167 MIN. N= (186)	88 MIN. (96)
MEAN VCR VIEWING TIME OF VCR USERS (BASED ON QUESTIONNAIRE VIEWING LISTS-QUESTION 43)	150 MIN. N= (44)	96 MIN. (5)
COMBINED MEAN TELEVISION AND VCR VIEWING TIME OF TV AND VCR USERS (QUESTIONS 42 AND 43)	199 MIN. N= (189)	92 MIN. (97)

(a) The questionnaire was administered to all London children on Wednesday, September 18, 1984 and to all New York children on Friday, November 30, 1984.

INTERVIEW (b)

	<u>NEW YORK</u>	<u>LONDON</u>
MEAN DAILY TELEVISION VIEWING _ TIME-ALL DAYS	133 MIN. N= (127)	100 MIN. (166)
MEAN DAILY VCR VIEWING TIME-WEEKDAYS AND SUNDAY (c)	60 MIN. N= (20)	113 MIN. (42)
MEAN TELEVISION VIEWING TIME- ONLY SUNDAY	188 MIN. N= (23)	136 MIN. (42)
MEAN DAILY TELEVISION VIEWING TIME-ONLY WEEKDAYS	121 MIN. N= (104)	87 MIN. (124)
COMBINED DAILY MEAN TELEVISION AND VCR VIEWING TIME-WEEKDAYS	132 MIN. N= (104)	111 MIN. (124)
COMBINED MEAN TELEVISION AND VCR VIEWING TIME-ONLY SUNDAY	188 MIN. N= (23)	177 MIN. (42)
COMBINED DAILY MEAN TELEVISION AND VCR VIEWING TIME-WEEKDAYS AND SUNDAY	142 MIN. N= (127)	128 MIN. (166)

- (b) The London interview period extended from Monday, September 24 through Friday, October 5, 1984. The New York interview period extended from Tuesday, December 4 through Wednesday, December 12 1984.
- (c) Since so few respondents claimed to have used the VCR the previous night, these mean VCR figures represent only those respondents who viewed one or more tapes on the VCR during the previous day.

The questionnaire figures in Table 4.1 show that the New York students estimated that on any given weekday afternoon, they watched 241 minutes of television, while London students estimated their weekday TV viewing time at 205 minutes. (Children were asked to exclude morning viewing from their estimates.) Based on these unverified self-estimates, we see that New York students claimed to watch 36 more minutes of television per weekday than did London students.

Mean weekday combined television and VCR viewing times based on what are assumed to be fairly accurate and

reliable interview responses was 132 minutes for the New York students as opposed to 111 minutes for the London students. If we compare this latter set of figures with the previously cited questionnaire self-estimate figures, we see that the differences between the amount of time children believed they spent viewing TV and the time they actually spent watching TV were comparable for both the New York and London samples (109 minutes and 94 minutes, respectively). This similarity suggests that all children in the two samples tended to over-estimate their television viewing by roughly 100%. The contention of Schramm, et al., (1957) that people tend to over-estimate their viewing time, appears to be confirmed by these sets of figures.

The magnitude of the difference between the questionnaire and interviews in reported viewing time strongly suggests that self-estimated viewing times tend to be highly unstable, unreliable and inaccurate. That is why this study based most of its conclusions from data derived from the in-depth interviews, in which children were carefully questioned about the programs they actually watched and the amount of time they actually spent watching these programs. When we examine these interview viewing figures, we will see that the total mean television and VCR viewing times are very similar for the London and New York students.

The combined mean television and VCR viewing times (for weekdays and Sunday) in Table 4.1 show that interviewed New York students tended to watch only 14 more minutes of television per day than did the interviewed

London students. If we observe the total television and VCR weekday viewing times and the total television and VCR Sunday mean viewing times, we see that New York students continued to watch slightly more television than did London students (21 and 11 minutes per day, respectively). And, as we also see in Table 4.2, these small differences continue to remain after these statistics are broken down into quartile divisions.

TABLE 4.2: QUARTILE BREAKDOWNS OF TOTAL TELEVISION AND VCR VIEWING TIME-BASED ON INTERVIEW DATA (WEEKDAYS AND SUNDAY)

	<u>NEW YORK</u>	<u>LONDON</u>
1 st QUARTILE	57 MIN.	54 MIN.
2 nd QUARTILE	107 MIN.	106 MIN.
3 rd QUARTILE	202 MIN.	168 MIN.
MAXIMUM	480 MIN.	800 MIN.(a)

- (a) One student claimed to have seen 800 minutes of television and video tapes. The interview was re-evaluated but no inaccuracies or inconsistencies in the respondent's statements were uncovered. The next highest London television viewing time (interview) was 560 minutes.

In Table 4.2, the breakdown of total mean interview television and VCR viewing times provides further evidence that London and New York mean televiewing differences were not significantly different. These figures show that first quartile viewing times for the New York and London samples were 57 minutes and 54 minutes, respectively. Median figures were 107 minutes and 106 minutes, respectively. These quartile comparisons demonstrate that 50% of the two samples watched less than 2 hours of television and VCR tapes per night. If we compare column figures, we also see that nearly identical viewing times

were recorded for the first two quartiles in each city, suggesting that mean television viewing figures are similarly dispersed in both samples, in spite of the differences which seemed to emerge for the third and fourth quartiles. New York and London standard deviations were 108.32 and 108.78, respectively-figures tending to confirm the observation that televiewing variances were very similar in the two samples.

We will see in a later section of this chapter and in Chapter 7 that television programming, cultural and environmental differences of the children in the two samples do exert some influence on children's viewing habits and their attitudes and access to television sets. Yet, despite these differences, we saw in Table 4.1 and 4.2 that children in London and New York still spent nearly identical amounts of time in front of their television sets.

Developmentalists, such as Jean Piaget, (1964) and Erik Erikson, (1963) believe that very specific psychosocial characteristics are associated with children at different stages of maturity. Winick and Winick, (1979:186) state that "children are not a simple entity but a series of different groups." Because the ages of all the viewers in both samples were between nine and eleven, it is quite possible that they had common needs drawing them to television sets and VCRs and common attention spans (or viewing thresholds) limiting the amount of time that they would want to spend watching television and VCRs. Most nine-to-eleven year olds might not be able to tolerate more than 2 1/2 hours of

television on any given day of the week, perhaps up to three hours on Sundays because of the large amount of time available for viewing and dropping to two hours on weekdays because of the limited amounts of time available for viewing because of school and homework commitments. Evidence about Sunday viewing supports this hypothesis.

Viewing Thresholds of Interviewed Sunday Television Viewers

Nielsen found that viewing time increases steadily with age for pre-teenagers.(2) Therefore, the amount of time children devote to television viewing might be more a function of the age and presumably, the psycho-social development of the child than economic, social or other environmental factors. Sunday viewing figures for the London and New York interviewees suggest that most nine-to-eleven year olds will limit their viewing to three hours, even on days when they do not have to go to school. Beyond this length of time, TV viewing apparently fails to gratify children's needs.

A small group of students in both samples were questioned about their Sunday leisure time pursuits, in general, and television viewing behavior, in particular. Their responses confirm that Sunday leisure activities can be very different from weekday activities.

If we observe the mean New York and London Sunday television viewing times (excluding VCR viewing), we see that the New York students watched 188 minutes of broadcast TV as compared with 136 minutes for the London sample. This 52 minute difference constitutes the largest difference among any category of televiewing time in Table

5.1. But when we include VCR viewing time with broadcast viewing time, the total viewing times (television + VCR) were virtually the same for the two samples (188 minutes in New York as opposed to 177 minutes in London.(3)

The London and New York Sunday viewers could have conceivably watched television from early morning until bedtime since the constraints of school and homework which limit children's viewing on weekdays do not normally exist on Sundays.

Both of these Sunday viewing groups did appear to watch television more than did the weekday viewing groups, but not as much as one might expect, considering the amount of time available for viewing on Sundays. Perhaps, most nine-to-eleven year olds have specific television viewing thresholds reached after three hours of viewing, after which they chose alternative activities.

Evidence for this hypothesis lies in the viewing behavior of the interviewed New York and London Sunday viewers. The New York viewers watched three hours of broadcast television and stopped viewing. None of the children used their VCR, even though 30% owned one and, presumably, could have used it if they decided to do so.

The London viewers watched only two hours of broadcast television. They were apparently dissatisfied with the programming because they then decided to watch an additional 52 minutes on their VCRs. They presumably could have watched many more VCR tapes, if they so desired, but chose not to do so.

If this threshold hypothesis is true, then we can infer that if broadcast television programming is

gratifying the needs of nine-to-eleven year olds, they will willingly watch three hours of broadcast television and forgo the use of their VCRs. On the other hand, if broadcast programming is not very satisfying, children would probably watch less than three hours of television and use their VCR (if one was available) to supplement the TV fare, up to the three hour viewing threshold.

The amount of time children devote to television viewing appears to be very predictable and stable for nine-to-eleven year olds. The figures in Tables 4.1 and 4.2 demonstrate that on any given day, New York and London children watch nearly identical amounts of television, in spite of the different programming available to the children in the two samples and in spite of the different percentages of video items owned by children in the two cities.

The Sunday and Weekday Televiewers: Variations in Daily Viewing Times

Each and every day of the year has its own unique social, environmental, academic and atmospheric characteristics, not to mention its own specific TV programming schedule. All these variables, as well as many other possible factors, could influence the amount of time children devote to any leisure time activity, including TV viewing.

Interview dates were randomly assigned to London schools and New York classes. But all classes in New York and some schools in London had particularly homogeneous groups of children, with respect to reading level and/or socio-economic status. It is entirely possible, therefore,

that atypical classes were selected for interviews on atypical programming days or atypical days of the week, thereby potentially producing either inflated or deflated viewing means for these respondents.

In fact, half of the 44 London students interviewed on Monday about their Sunday activities attended Mineplain School. These students can probably be characterized as average readers from working class backgrounds, although this school refused to provide students' reading scores. The other half of the London Sunday interviewees attended Abbey Melton school. These children can generally be regarded as upper-middle class, above average readers. Since all of the 23 New York Sunday interviewees were enrolled at P.S. 103 were in class 5-1, these children can be generally classified as above average readers from middle class backgrounds.

The small viewing time differences between London and New York might, therefore, be attributed to sample differences, since both Sunday samples were not cross-matched according to social and academic characteristics.

In addition, we cannot rule out the possibility that the high mean Sunday viewing figures in New York were more closely associated with reading level rather than with the large amount of discretionary time available to children on Sundays, since all the New York Sunday interviewees were above average readers.

The above discussion on Sunday viewing and Sunday discretionary leisure time leads us to a major methodological problem for this and other media studies: Whether we decide to exclude from mean viewing figures any

extreme variations in children's daily viewing times because they are aberrant cases or whether we include all daily viewing times as "normal" cases.

Short of employing a very huge sample and conducting a series of interviews over a very long period of time, the average viewing times in a study such as this are very sensitive to any deviant set of circumstances occurring on any particular day. Since 22% of the entire sample were questioned about their Sunday activities, and since Sunday mean viewing figures are larger than weekday figures, we must try to determine whether it is wise to include these "Sunday" cases in the analyses of children's mean viewing or to exclude these cases because they do not typify the "weekday" cases. Such a decision ultimately depends on just how atypical Sundays are as compared to weekdays.

Since children do not attend school on Sundays, they consequently have much more discretionary time for television viewing and other activities than they would normally have on weekdays. In addition, Sunday leisure time activities and Sunday television programming and viewing habits are not typical of a child's weekday activities and viewing habits. (Sunday programming in London did include a special screening of a James Bond film. Most children interviewed on Monday said that they had watched this film. Very few London children watched feature films during the weekdays.

If we compare Sunday, weekdays and Sunday through Thursday combined television and VCR viewing times, we see rather predictable results. London and New York children increased their Sunday total television and VCR viewing by

66 and 56 minutes over their weekday viewing times, to a total of 177 and 188 minutes, respectively.

Some of this increased London viewing can be partially explained by the fairly large number of children who watched the special 2 1/2 hour film on Sunday and by the number who supplemented their broadcast television viewing with VCR viewing. But New York children also dramatically increased their television viewing on Sunday, even though there did not appear to be any special film or program for that day. Increased discretionary time on Sundays, rather than programming factors, seems to account for the high average Sunday viewing times.

While Sundays may be atypical activity and viewing days, some weekdays during the interview period also had unusual characteristics (e.g. special programs and/or particularly popular programming schedules) with concomitantly higher than average combined television and VCR viewing times for these specific days.

For the New York sample, the Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday combined television and VCR viewing means were 136, 137 and 102 minutes (combined weekday mean is 132 minutes), respectively, in contrast with 188 minutes for Sunday. The London Monday through Thursday combined television and VCR means were 124, 160, 86 and 102 minutes (combined weekday mean is 111 minutes), respectively, in contrast with 136 minutes for Sunday.

In New York, Sunday appeared to be an exceptional viewing day since the combined Sunday television/VCR viewing mean was 51 minutes greater than the next highest weekday mean. On the other hand, the London figures show

that the Sunday television/VCR viewing mean was only 12 minutes greater than the next highest weekday mean, so in London, Sunday was not an exceptional viewing day.

Under generally accepted statistical procedures, the days with the highest and lowest viewing means would be eliminated. Unfortunately, this study does not have the luxury of such a large sample and such a large number of interviews to simply delete the highest and lowest viewing days from the total mean viewing times.

It would, thus, be unreasonable to justify the elimination of all Sunday cases simply because Sunday happens to have some characteristics distinguishing it from the other days of the week, especially since London Sundays do not produce terribly different viewing means from those of the weekdays. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, unless stated otherwise, Sunday viewing times will be included in all tables which use mean television viewing time as a variable.

Video Media and Television Reinforcement

Schramm et al. (1961) hypothesized that television will displace functionally similar activities if children believe that TV is better suited to the gratification of specific needs (particularly fantasy or reality needs) than the previously used activities. Schramm et al. (1961) and Himmelweit et al. (1958) showed that when television was first introduced, children with television sets tended to see fewer movies, listen to fewer radio programs and read fewer comic books than did non-owners because television was a more effective gratifier of

fantasy needs than either radio, movies or books. The implication of this theory is that television will displace functionally similar activities if children perceive television to be a better gratifier of needs than the activity being displaced.

Brown, Cramond, and Wilde (1974) showed that television did alter the leisure activity patterns of children in a small Scottish village after TV was introduced, but they did not characterize these alterations as displacement. Rather, they saw "media use as adaptive behavior characterized by an on-going process of reorganization, the dynamic of which is provided by changes in the communications environment and developments in the audience member's unfolding experience." Thus, TV does not displace other activities, so much as it reorganizes the way children gratify their needs. Under some circumstances, television will displace functionally similar activities; under other circumstances, it will complement these activities. We will also see that ownership of some video items, particularly bedroom television sets, actually reinforce television use.

A micro-motivational, media reinforcement theory would assume that a television in a child's bedroom and ownership of television related hardware (VCRs and cable TV, in particular) enhance the television viewing experience, thereby, encouraging children to view more television than they might normally choose to do. If this theory was correct, we would find that children who own and use bedroom television sets and video-related media watch more television than do non-owners and non-users.

The following sections will describe the television reinforcement theory as it applies to ownership and usage of VCRs, televisions in the respondents' bedroom, cable television, computers, and video games.

VCR Ownership and Usage and Television Viewing

If we compare viewing times of all VCR non-owners with that of VCR owners, we see that 28% of the VCR owners watched more than three hours of television as compared with 20% of the non-owners. Conversely, 25% of the owners watched less than one hour of television as compared with 36% of the non-owners. While the Gamma for these figures is not very high (.18), this measure of association does indicate that a weak but positive relationship does exist between VCR ownership and the amount of children's television viewing.

In London, there was a very significant, positive relationship between VCR ownership and total viewing time (Gamma = .44, with 35% of the VCR owners watching 3 hours or more as compared to only 10% of the non-owners), while in New York, there was, surprisingly, a negative, weak relationship between these two variables. These and other figures which will be discussed in a later section of this chapter, seem to indicate that London VCR owners were much more likely to supplement their broadcast viewing with VCRs, than were New York VCR owners and, therefore, would also have higher television viewing times than New York owners.

We saw in Table 4.1 that on any given day, most children who owned VCRs did not use their VCRs (this was

particularly true for New York children). Therefore, we would not necessarily expect to see a very strong association between VCR ownership and total viewing time, even though we did find that such a significant relationship did exist in London.

A more valid and reliable method for determining the impact of VCRs on children's total viewing time would be to measure the relationship between VCR users and non-users rather than VCR owners and non-owners and total viewing time. This kind of comparison also helps determine whether VCRs supplement or displace television viewing.

Table 4.3 compares the total mean television and VCR viewing times of the interviewed VCR users and non-users.

TABLE 4.3: TOTAL MEAN TV AND VCR VIEWING TIMES OF VCR USERS AND NON-USERS IN LONDON AND NEW YORK (BASED ON INTERVIEW DATA)

<u>VCR USAGE</u>	<u>VCR USERS</u>			<u>VCR NON-USERS</u>		
	<u>LON</u>	<u>NY</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>LON</u>	<u>NY</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>
<u>TV VIEWING LEVEL</u>						
1 HOUR OR LESS	7%	15%	10%	41%	28%	35%
1-2 HOURS	24	35	27	29	29	29
2-3 HOURS	17	30	21	17	14	15
MORE THAN 3 HOURS	52	20	42	14	28	21
N =	100% (42)	100% (20)	100% (62)	100% (125)	100% (109)	100% (234)

This table shows that VCR users tended to watch more television than did non-VCR users. For the entire sample, the mean total TV and VCR viewing time of the VCR users was 200 minutes as compared to only 129 minutes for the non-users. Forty-two percent of the users watched three

hours or more and 21% watched between two and three hours, as compared with 21% and 15%, respectively, for the non-users.

In London, the mean viewing times of VCR users and non-users were very different. VCR users had total viewing times of 222 minutes, while the non-users watched TV for only 102 minutes. Fifty-two percent of the users watched three hours or more and 17% watched between two and three hours, as compared with 14% and 17%, respectively, for the non-users.

In New York, however, the mean viewing times of users and non-users were very similar (161 and 155 minutes, respectively), with the frequency distributions showing that 20% of all users watched 3 hours or more and 30% watched between 2-3 hours, as compared with 28% and 14%, respectively, for the non-users.(4)

Among users in New York, the proportion watching two hours or more was eight percentage points higher than among non-users, while for the London sample, the proportion was 38 percentage points higher for the VCR users than the non-users. The mean viewing difference between London VCR users and non-users was two hours while the mean difference between New York VCR users and non-users was six minutes. Thus, in both samples, VCR users (particularly among the London children) did watch more television than non-VCR users, confirming the original hypothesis that VCR usage does tend to reinforce television viewing by supplementing the broadcast television programming.

We have seen that while virtually identical

percentages of New York and London families owned VCRs, significantly higher percentages of London children used VCRs than did New York children (25% as compared with 16%, respectively). Content analyses of London and New York broadcast programming can lead us to suspect that because London television broadcasts fewer children's programs than in New York, London children might tend to supplement this paucity of programs with VCR programs. The New York broadcast schedule, on the other hand, contains a great many programs which are targeted for the nine-to-eleven year old population. Consequently, children in the New York sample appeared to be reasonably satisfied with the available programming and so did not feel the need to supplement broadcast fare with VCR programs.

For New York children, VCRs seemed to be rather redundant pieces of video hardware used on fairly rare occasions when broadcast television did not air gratifying children's programs, while for London children, VCRs appeared to be fairly important television adjuncts reasonably well integrated into the repertoire of children's viewing options.

One important implication of these findings is that VCR ownership and usage is generally associated with higher amounts of children's televiewing. This seems especially true when broadcast television programming is not very satisfying, in which case children use their VCRs as a supplemental source of entertainment, as was done by the London viewers.

However, when broadcast television programming is apparently satisfying, children will eschew VCRs and

devote their attention solely to broadcast television, as was done by the New York viewers. Ownership and usage of VCRs, in and of itself, does not appear to influence total viewing time as much as macro-structural characteristics associated with those who control the quality and quantity of broadcast programming which is made available to children (see analyses of New York and London programming in a later section of this chapter).

Television Sets in Children's Bedrooms and Television Viewing

Children in both London and New York who had television sets in their bedrooms tended to watch more television than did children without their own sets. The presence of computers, computer and video games, cable TV, and multiple household TVs had no effect on total viewing time. [Gammas for these other items ranged from .09 to .12 for the entire sample. Similarly small Gammas were found for the New York-London sub-samples. None of the Chi-squares were significant at the .05 level].

Table 4.4 shows the respondents' level of television viewing by ownership of a television in the respondents' bedroom.

TABLE 4.4: LEVEL OF TELEVISION VIEWING BY OWNERSHIP OF A TELEVISION IN THE RESPONDENTS' BEDROOMS BY CITY OF RESIDENCE

<u>VIDEO ITEM</u>	<u>NO TV IN BEDROOM</u>			<u>TV IN BEDROOM</u>		
	<u>NY</u>	<u>LON</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>NY</u>	<u>LON</u>	<u>Total</u>
<u>TV VIEWING LEVEL</u>						
1 HOUR OR LESS	33%	37%	36%	20%	14%	18%
1-2 HOURS	38	29	32	23	23	23
2-3 HOURS	11	14	13	23	23	23
MORE THAN 3 HOURS	19	20	20	34	41	36
N =	100% (64)	100% (130)	100% (194)	100% (56)	100% (22)	100% (78)

NY Gamma = .356
 London Gamma = .459
 Total Gamma = .381

Household ownership of cable TV, computers, video games, and multiple television sets appeared to have very little, if any, effect on the children's level of television viewing, as we have seen from the previously cited very low Gammas. There is, consequently, little evidence to show that ownership and, inferentially, usage of these specific video items, tends to either displace or reinforce children's television viewing levels, contrary to our hypothesis.

But Table 4.4 does provide some confirmation for the reinforcement theory as it applies to ownership of bedroom television sets, since this table shows that children who had televisions in their bedrooms tended to watch more television than children who didn't have televisions in their rooms. More specifically, children who had television sets in their bedrooms were nearly twice as likely to watch more than two hours of television as were children who did not have televisions in their rooms.

The presence of a television in a child's bedroom appears to have a large impact on children's total television viewing time. Parents who decide to buy a television for their children's personal use and decide to place it in their child's bedroom, appear to be consciously or unconsciously encouraging their children to watch more television than they might ordinarily watch. We will see in Chapter 8 that bedroom television sets(both for children and parents) also appear to have significant impact on family structure and intra-familial interactions by reducing the amount and altering the quality of communication between parents, children and siblings.

Television Related Rules and Total Television Viewing Time

We have seen that parents indirectly influence their children's viewing behavior when they place television sets in their children's bedrooms. We will see that parents directly influence viewing behavior when they establish rules which restrict their children's viewing. Macro-structural characteristics of each city's TV programming influence whether parents institute various kinds of viewing constraints.

Thirty-six percent of the children responded on the questionnaire that their parents have rules about how and when they can watch TV. Table 4.5 shows that the New York and London interviewed children who had these types of rules were much less likely to be high level viewers than were children who did not have the rules.

TABLE 4.5: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHILDREN WHO HAVE TV RELATED RULES AND TOTAL TELEVISION VIEWING TIME

<u>TV RULES</u>	<u>NEW YORK</u>		<u>LONDON</u>		<u>ENTIRE SAMPLE</u>	
	<u>YES</u>	<u>NO</u>	<u>YES</u>	<u>NO</u>	<u>YES</u>	<u>NO</u>
<u>AMOUNT OF TV VIEWING</u>						
LESS THAN 1 HOUR	30%	24%	43%	28%	36%	26%
1-2 HOURS	41	22	30	28	36	25
2-3 HOURS	22	12	11	17	17	15
3 OR MORE HOURS	7	43	16	28	11	34
N =	100% (54)	100% (68)	100% (44)	100% (105)	100% (98)	100% (173)
GAMMA =	.388		.295		.318	

The figures in Table 4.5 show that for the entire sample, parents who did not set television related rules were three times more likely to have children who watched three or more hours of television as were parents who had such rules. In the highest New York viewing level category, there was a 36 percentage point difference between the rule setters and non-setters, while in London, the difference was 12 percentage points.

This table also shows that while approximately half of the New York children had TV related rules and half did not, London children were 2 1/2 times as likely not to have rules as to have rules. These differences can probably be explained by the different TV programming practices in each city.

In London, all weekday TV ends by midnight and adult-oriented programs are not aired until the later hours of the night, whereas in New York, shows are aired all night

long and many types of adult-oriented programs are shown during the afternoon and early evening hours. Since London TV programming appears to be less problematic for parents than New York programming, London parents probably do not feel the need to establish as many TV prohibitions.

In support of this supposition, of the interviewed children who had TV rules, 83% of the New York children, but only 41% of the London children stated that there were certain programs they could not watch because the shows had too much violence, sex, bad language, etc. These figures confirm Schramm's (1959) belief that parents are "responsible in no small measure for what (children) select from television." However, since the British broadcasters apparently have accepted a greater responsibility to regulate programming than American broadcasters, parental responsibility appears to be something of a moot issue in London, as compared to New York.

Sex, Ethnicity, Parent's Occupational Status and Television Viewing

The figures in Table 4.1 showed that there were very few differences in the total amount of televiewing between New York and London children, however, viewing time differences might still exist between the various sex, ethnic, and occupational status groups within each of the sub-samples.

Television Viewing By Sex

It is difficult to distinguish between macro-structural gender based socialization practices and micro-

motivational gender based behavior since the former greatly influences the attitudes, norms, values and viewing preferences of boys and girls. Nevertheless, Noble (1975) and others noticed that girls tend to watch slightly less amounts of television than do boys, but Medrich et al. (1980) found no significant differences between the number of viewing hours of boys and girls. The figures in Table 4.6 will confirm Noble's findings.

Table 4.6 will show the relationship between total television viewing time and respondents' sex.

TABLE 4.6: TOTAL TELEVISION VIEWING TIME (a) BY RESPONDENTS' SEX

<u>SEX</u>	<u>MALES</u>	<u>FEMALES</u>
<u>AMOUNT OF TV VIEWING</u>		
1 HOUR OR LESS	25%	35%
1-2 HOURS	27	31
2-3 HOURS	21	13
3 HOURS OR MORE	27	22
	100%	100%
N=	(137)	(156)

Gamma = -.190

(a) Based on interview data

As seen in Table 4.6, males tended to watch more television than females, although these differences were not very large. The percentage differences for the 3 hours or more and the 2-3 hour categories are only five and eight percentage points, respectively, in favor of males. The findings in this table confirm Noble's (1975) findings that male youngsters tend to watch television slightly more than do females.

Television Viewing By Ethnicity

According to Greenberg and Dervin (1968), Blacks tend to watch about 45 minutes more television each day than Whites, regardless of income, education and age. Table 4.7 describes the relationship between total television viewing time and respondents' ethnicity. These figures tend to confirm Greenberg and Dervin's findings.

TABLE 4.7: TOTAL TELEVISION VIEWING TIME BY ETHNIC BACKGROUND

<u>TOTAL TELEVISION VIEWING TIME</u>	<u>ETHNIC GROUPS (a)</u>			
	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>
1 HOUR OR LESS	32%	3%	39%	33%
1-2 HOURS	31	33	17	27
2-3 HOURS	15	30	22	13
3 HOURS OR MORE	22	33	22	26
N =	<u>100%</u> (156)	<u>100%</u> (30)	<u>100%</u> (23)	<u>100%</u> (84)

CRAMER'S V= .133

(a) ETHNIC GROUP CODES

1=White-English speakers 3=Hispanic
2=Black-English speakers 4=Other Non-English speakers

The figures in Table 4.7 show that Blacks tended to watch more television than did Whites. While nearly one-third of the White English speakers, Hispanics and Other Non-English speakers watched less than one hour, almost no Blacks watched this little. Conversely, 63% of the Blacks watched more than two hours of television, as compared to approximately 40% for each of the other three groups. It is also interesting to note that the cell percentage figures for the Hispanic, White-English speakers and Other

Non-English speakers are very similar, indicating that ethnicity is not as strongly associated with total viewing time as are factors associated with race.

This study cannot provide any significant data to explain why Blacks appeared to watch so much more television than all other ethnic and racial groups in the sample. In Chapter 7, we will see that of all the ethnic groups, the smallest percentage of children who played outdoors were Blacks. Since Blacks do not play outdoors as often as children in other ethnic groups, they would probably spend more time indoors watching television. We could, therefore, assume that for many Black children, TV has become a functional alternative for playtime.

Atkin (1979); Berry (1980); and Medrich et al. (1982) found that lower class children watch significantly more television than do middle and upper-middle class children. These researchers generally attributed this additional viewing time to the relative isolation experienced by the lower class children. Possibly, Black children do experience greater amounts of ostracism from their White peers, and consequently would spend more time in the house viewing television than White children.

Television Viewing By Parents' Occupational Status

Contrary to the findings of the above cited researchers, this study found a small positive association between total televiewing time and parents' occupational status. Cramer's V for this crosstabulation was .133. The correlation coefficients for the New York and London samples were similarly low. This finding could be

explained by the fact that VCR ownership was positively associated with high TV viewing times and higher occupational status families were more likely to own VCRs than the lower status families.

While we saw in Chapter 3 that parents' occupational status did appear to be associated with ownership of some video hardware, and while we will see in Chapter 8 that occupational status is also associated with ownership and usage of television sets in parents' bedrooms, factors associated with occupational status do not appear to directly influence the amount of time children devote to watching television.

The various television viewing time figures and the subsequent tables and measures of association which were presented in this sub-section provide fairly strong evidence for the contention that television viewing routines are very well established for most children and these routines do not seem to vary a great deal with the child's sex, ethnicity or parent's occupational status. Race does, however, appear to have an important, but somewhat indirect, influence on Black children's viewing habits. We will see in Chapter 7 that since Black children do not go outside to play as often as Whites, they would presumably spend more time in the house watching television than would their White counterparts.

Television Program Category Ratings

Nielsen and Roper publish monthly program ratings which include mean viewing times for children between the ages of 6 and 12. In addition to these published

findings, they also produce statistics on the number of children in this category who watch specific programs. Nielsen and Roper's data are based on viewer diaries, which are not terribly reliable instruments for adults, let alone for children, and/or "black box" statistics which can only identify when a television is on but not whether people are actually watching any program. In contrast to the unreliability of the Roper and Nielsen data and the loss of essential information arising from their decision to collapse six-to-twelve year olds into one composite group, this study attempts to provide more accurate and more useful information concerning children's program viewing preferences and habits.

There are many similarities between London and New York television programming. In both cities, daily afternoon programs are specifically targeted at the pre-teen audience. In addition to these kinds of children's programs, both cities' television media daily broadcast at least several situation comedies, dramatic series, and documentary/news shows.

There are also some important differences between London and New York television programming. In London, afternoon children's programs on ITV (Independent TV) and the BBC are rather restrained affairs. Most of these animated programs can be characterized as "educationally oriented." In New York, nearly all children's programs are action-oriented, often violent, cartoons. Public Broadcasting System (PBS) also airs educational programs, such as Sesame Street, Electric Company and 1-2-3, but very few children chose to watch them.

The most obvious difference, however, is in the quantity of the programs. On the weekday preceding the questionnaire administration in New York, for example, approximately 60 television programs aired between 3:30-10:00, excluding UHF and cable. On London's four channels, approximately 40 programs were aired. New York children were, consequently, presented with 66% more programs from which to choose than were London children, if we consider only the VHF broadcast television schedule. If cable and UHF programs are included, many New York children had access to an even higher percentage of program choices than did London children.

Although there were definite quantitative programming differences between New York and London television, qualitatively, the two television systems are fairly similar. Yet, in spite of these comparable program menus, London and New York children demonstrated very different viewing preferences.

On any given day, nearly identical percentages of New York and London children chose to view dramatic series, game shows and sports programs. However, significantly different percentages of children chose to view sitcoms, news/documentaries, children's programs, and morning news programs, even though both sub-samples also had access to at least one program in each of these categories.

The next section will discuss some of the social and environmental factors which influence how and why children decided to view specific television program categories and why differences in some viewing categories existed between the New York and London samples.

Children's Viewing Preferences

The following micro-motivational and macro-structural analyses of children's viewing preferences will show that while London and New York children had somewhat different viewing preferences, these differences might be more easily explained by the types of programs aired in each city rather than by cultural characteristics associated with each city's sample of students. We will also see that some, but not all program viewing preferences were associated with either race, ethnicity, gender or reading ability.

Table 4.8 shows the percentage of the interviewed London and New York samples who watched at least part of any television program category as well as the mean number of minutes children watched these programs.(5)

TABLE 4.8: TELEVISION PROGRAM CATEGORY RATINGS FOR
INTERVIEWED STUDENTS BY CITY OF RESIDENCE-SUNDAY
THROUGH THURSDAY

	<u>CARTOONS</u>		<u>SITCOMS</u>		<u>DRAMATIC SERIES</u>		<u>FEATURE FILMS</u>	
	<u>N.Y.</u>	<u>LON</u>	<u>N.Y.</u>	<u>LON</u>	<u>N.Y.</u>	<u>LON</u>	<u>N.Y.</u>	<u>LON</u>
<u>MEAN MINUTES</u>	32	8	27	11	33	22	5	23
<u>% WHO VIEWED</u>	50%	25%	47%	22%	46%	34%	5%	22%

	<u>VARIETY/ VIDEOS</u>		<u>DOCUMENTARY/ NEWS</u>		<u>CHILDRENS' PROGRAMS</u>		<u>GAME SHOWS</u>	
	<u>N.Y.</u>	<u>LON</u>	<u>N.Y.</u>	<u>LON</u>	<u>N.Y.</u>	<u>LON</u>	<u>N.Y.</u>	<u>LON</u>
<u>MEAN MINUTES</u>	5	6	2	7	1	6	3	3
<u>% WHO VIEWED</u>	9%	18%	5%	15%	4%	15%	9%	9%

	<u>SPORTS</u>		<u>MORNING NEWS</u>		<u>MORNING CARTOONS</u>	
	<u>N.Y.</u>	<u>LON</u>	<u>N.Y.</u>	<u>LON</u>	<u>N.Y.</u>	<u>LON</u>
<u>MEAN MINUTES</u>	5	2	1	7	14	0
<u>% WHO VIEWED</u>	4%	3%	2%	17%	32%	0

NEW YORK N =(129)	LONDON N =(167)

According to the figures in Table 4.8, significantly higher percentages of New York children watched afternoon and morning cartoons, sitcoms, and dramatic series, than did London children. New York children also spent significantly more time watching these programs than did London children.

Conversely, significantly higher percentages of London children viewed feature films, variety shows, documentary/news and morning news shows and London children also spent significantly more time watching these programs than did New York children. We will also see that nearly identical percentages of London and New York children viewed game shows and sports and that London and New York children spent nearly identical amounts of time

watching programs in these two categories.

London children devoted a greater amount of their time to viewing feature films, documentaries/newscasts, and morning news shows than did New York children. These shows require listeners to have longer attention spans and higher levels of general information than do cartoons, sitcoms and dramatic series (typically soap operas and comedy shows).

London children seem to prefer more highbrow programs than do New York children. We will see in Chapter 5 that with the exception of news and documentary programs, there was virtually no association between reading ability and program category preferences, so we cannot say that London children watched these more intellectually demanding programs because they are higher academic achievers than are New York children.

We also cannot say that higher percentages of London children watched news/documentaries and feature films than New York children did because London broadcasters aired higher percentages of these programs than did broadcasters in New York. Although in absolute terms, much more programming is available to New Yorkers than to Londoners, the percentage distributions of the major program categories in London and New York are generally very similar.(6) The existing differences would probably not account for some of the very large New York-London viewing differences found in Table 4.8.

The data, therefore, do not provide conclusive answers as to why London children watched more feature films, news/documentaries, and children's programs than

New York children did. However, London programmers appear to schedule news, documentaries, feature films and children's programs in different time slots, as opposed to New York programmers who tend to schedule these types of shows within the same periods of time. It would seem, therefore, that London children have more opportunities to see these programs than do New Yorkers because the London programs do not compete for children's attention, as appears to be the case in New York. The following analysis might help us understand how and why children decided to watch specific programs.

One of the major micro-motivational hypotheses of this study is that children purposefully select those leisure time activities and those television programs which gratify and fulfill their perceived needs. Children can be very discriminating and even very demanding consumers of leisure activities, if given choices. A complementary macro-structural hypothesis states that when choices are not given, they will passively accept whatever activities are made available, but very little attention and enthusiasm will be devoted to these pursuits.

We can see some evidence of the validity of both hypotheses, as they apply to children's television viewing preferences, by looking at the figures in the morning news and morning cartoon categories in Table 4.8.

The three major New York networks broadcast several hours of feature news programs and the independent stations tend to air cartoons during the 7:00-9:00 a.m. time slot. In London, no cartoons are aired in the morning, but one channel has recently developed a morning

feature news program patterned after the New York morning feature news shows.

In New York, 38% of the interviewed respondents said that they usually watch TV in the morning and 39% of the respondents actually watched TV on the morning of the interviews. The vast majority of these morning viewers (90%) said that they watched morning cartoon shows while very few (10%) viewed a morning news program.

In London, a nearly identical percentage of the interviewed sample (37%) said that they usually watch TV in the morning and most of these (30%) respondents actually watched TV on the morning of the interviews. But, in contrast with the New York students, 83% of the Londoners said that they watched the morning news shows while the remaining 17% said that they watched cartoons on the VCR.

This cross-cultural comparison of morning viewing habits allows us to make very interesting observations about children's program preferences in general, and cartoon viewing in particular.

In New York, when presented with a choice of cartoon or news programs, children overwhelmingly, and not surprisingly, selected cartoons. In London, when the television choices were news programs or no television at all, most children who usually watched morning TV, chose the news programs.

During the interviews, London children exhibited very little enthusiasm for these morning news programs. Many children admitted that they didn't "really watch" these programs; that the television was merely on while they

were getting dressed or eating breakfast. When they were asked about news stories which were broadcast on the morning of the interview, most children could not recall very many facts or details about these events.

London children did not seem to watch these morning news programs because they were curious about the world they lived in; rather, they used the television more as a source of subliminal sensory stimulation, than as an entertainment or informational medium. It is not very surprising that 17% of the morning viewers went to the trouble of setting up the VCR in order to watch cartoons, rather than watch an ungratifying news program or not watch television at all.

New York children, on the other hand, tended to devote a great deal of attention to the morning cartoon shows broadcast on channels 5 and 11 during the pre-school hours. In fact, the three most popular cartoon shows children listed in the questionnaire, Heathcliff, Voltron and He-Man, were all aired during these morning time slots and the after-school, 4-5:00 p.m. slots as well. Many children admitted to watching these shows in the morning and afternoon. Some proudly declared that they "got up a lot earlier than I have to so I can watch them."

Childrens' viewing behavior can be characterized as being both passive and assertive. Children purposefully select favorite programs, if given choices. However, if they not given choices, they watch whatever is available rather than forgo watching TV. We might conclude that television gratifies different sets of needs for passive and assertive viewers.

Children's Use of Television Listings

While television is often criticized as a particularly passive activity for children, the micro-analytical component of the uses-gratifications approach states that children can be and, in fact, are active and discriminating TV viewers. Questionnaire and interview responses will confirm this latter position.

Two items on the questionnaire asked the children about how they select their television programs. Ninety one percent of the New York children and 74% of the Londoners said that they have a television listing in their house. Of these TV list owners, 88% of the New Yorkers and 85% of the Londoners said that they use these listings either some days or almost always. Clearly, the high number of respondents who have and use a TV listing supports the micro-motivational hypothesis that most children make rather conscious and pre-meditated choices about which programs they will watch on any given day.

It is interesting to note that children still seem to take the extra, precautionary step of consulting television schedules in order not to inadvertently miss a favorite program, even though most of the more popular children's programs are aired on the same channels and at the same times every day of the week. We will see in a later section of this chapter that even though children are highly committed to these favorite programs and most likely do not need to consult TV listings to know when the programs will be aired, they still take the precautionary measure of examining the TV listings in order not to miss seeing their programs.

Peer Influence on Viewing Choices

Rubin (1985:197) contends that "it is not age per se that determines (TV) content selection and use, but individual, family, and social factors along with the desire to fulfill gratification-seeking motives."

A large body of social science literature demonstrates the importance of peer influence on children's viewing preferences (Medrich et al., 1982; Lyle and Hoffman, 1972 and Riley and Riley, 1951). Medrich et al., for example, observed that conversation topics among school age children centered on discussions about the preceding day's television programs. He concluded that children often decide to watch television programs because they are popular with their classmates, rather than because they are especially interesting to the child. This finding implies that indirect and direct peer pressure affects children's television program choices. But we must also bear in mind micro-motivational considerations associated with the child's psycho-social development (in particular, age) and general interests (possibly reading ability) as influences on how and why these choices are made.

Table 4.9 provides some evidence for a peer pressure theory. This table shows the percentage of questionnaire respondents in each New York class and each London school who watched various programs during the previous day. It should be stressed that 45% of the London sample and 15% of the New York sample did not respond to this question (see Note 1). Consequently, we have no way of knowing whether these children really didn't watch TV on the

previous day or they simply did not choose to answer the question.

TABLE 4.9: PERCENTAGE OF QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONDENTS IN EACH
- NEW YORK CLASS AND EACH LONDON SCHOOL WHO
WATCHED VARIOUS TYPES OF PROGRAMS DURING THE
PREVIOUS DAY (7)

<u>LONDON</u>						
<u>PROGRAM</u> <u>CATEGORY</u>	<u>ABBEY</u> <u>MELTON</u>	<u>FREE</u> <u>TOWNS</u>	<u>YARBINE</u>	<u>MINE</u> <u>PLAIN</u>	<u>HORTAINE</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>
<u>FEATURE FILMS</u>						
YOUNG FRANKENSTEIN	5%	21%	9%	27%	50%	19%
<u>SITCOMS</u>						
BUTTERFLYS	33	18	17	13	13	20
ALICE	5	3	9	0	0	4
<u>DRAMATIC SERIES</u>						
INVISIBLE MAN	28	24	26	27	13	25
STAR TREK	17	24	4	13	0	14
CROSSROADS	0	0	9	0	0	3
ROCKFORD FILES	5	0	0	0	0	1
EMMERDALE FARM	0	0	0	7	0	1
BROOKSIDE	0	0	9	0	13	3
<u>CHILDREN'S PROGRAM</u>						
CHILDREN'S ITV	5	27	13	40	13	21
PUZZLE TRAIL	11	18	4	0	0	9
RED HAND GANG	0	27	0	0	0	9
HE-MAN*	0	6	17	0	0	6
ON SAFARI	5	6	0	0	25	5
TOM AND JERRY*	0	0	4	13	0	3
ADVENTURE LIFETIME	11	0	0	0	0	2
<u>NEWS/DOCUMENTARY</u>						
NEWS	5	36	4	27	25	21
GOOD MORNING BRIT.	0	3	9	0	0	3
NEWS ROUND	0	6	0	0	0	2
REPORTING LONDON	0	3	0	0	0	2
WHAT IT'S WORTH	0	0	4	0	0	2
BOAT SHOW	5	0	0	0	0	1
<u>VARIETY/VIDEO</u>						
LENNY HENRY	44	18	48	20	25	31
DES O'CONNOR	5	0	4	20	0	5
<u>GAME SHOWS</u>						
GIVE US A CLUE	11	3	13	20	0	9
POP QUIZ	17	3	9	7	0	7
<u>N OF CHILDREN</u>						
WHO VIEWED TV =	(18)	(33)	(23)	(15)	(8)	(97)
* CARTOONS						

(TABLE 4.9, CON'T)

NEW YORK										
PROGRAM	CATEGORY	4-7	5-1	4-3	BROOKLYN		5-6	4TH	MANHASSET	
					5-3	4-5			5TH	TOTAL
<u>FEATURE FILMS</u>										
SMURFS MOVIE*		35%	16%	38%	25%	18%	30%	12%	0%	22%
<u>SITCOMS</u>										
COSBY SHOW		30	69	33	63	18	52	18	18	41
FAMILY TIES		35	72	21	60	5	30	29	12	36
THREE'S COMPANY		50	47	29	25	32	22	6	29	32
CHEERS		20	44	4	22	0	13	18	6	18
ONE DAY AT A TIME		20	19	4	25	14	13	6	12	15
JEFFERSONS		20	16	13	25	18	13	0	6	15
NIGHT COURT		10	38	4	16	0	9	6	6	13
HAPPY DAYS		5	9	13	25	5	9	6	6	11
BENSON		0	16	0	13	0	0	6	0	5
BARNEY MILLER		0	0	4	9	5	0	0	0	3
MASH		0	3	4	9	0	0	0	0	3
ARCHIE BUNKER		0	0	0	9	0	9	0	0	3
HONEYMOONERS		0	0	0	3	5	0	6	0	2
ODD COUPLE		0	0	0	3	0	0	6	0	1
<u>DRAMATIC SERIES</u>										
LITTLE HOUSE		15	25	33	41	14	17	18	24	25
DUKES OF HAZZARD		10	6	8	19	14	9	6	12	11
MAGNUM P.I.		5	3	0	0	0	9	29	6	5
HART TO HART		0	3	4	0	14	0	0	0	3
GENERAL HOSPITAL		0	3	0	6	0	0	0	0	2
HILL STREET BLUES		0	0	0	9	0	0	0	6	2
SIMON AND SIMON		0	3	4	3	0	0	0	6	2
ONE LIFE TO LIVE		0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	1
ALL MY CHILDREN		0	3	0	3	0	0	0	0	1
EDGE OF NIGHT		0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
DALLAS		0	3	0	0	0	4	0	0	1
GUIDING LIGHT		5	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
* cartoons										

PROGRAM	CATEGORY	4-7	5-1	BROOKLYN		4-5	5-6	MANHASSET		TOTAL
				4-3	5-3			4TH	5TH	
<u>CHILDREN'S PROGRAMS</u>										
3-2-1		10	0	0	0	5	0	0	0	2
DARK CRYSTAL*		0	3	0	0	0	4	0	0	1
<u>CARTOONS</u>										
HEATHCLIFF		45	50	54	60	36	9	41	12	40
VOLTRON		50	38	50	47	32	9	18	6	33
HE-MAN		20	28	29	19	32	17	6	0	20
SUPERFRIENDS		5	13	8	19	18	4	0	0	10
WOODY WOODPECKER		20	9	17	13	9	0	6	0	10
FAT ALBERT		20	9	4	3	5	9	0	0	6
INSPECTOR GADGET		10	0	4	16	5	4	0	0	5
SCOOPY DOO		5	0	4	3	0	4	0	0	2
POPEYE		5	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	1
G I JOE		0	0	0	0	5	4	0	0	1
<u>NEWS/DOCUMENTARY</u>										
NEWS		5	13	4	19	5	0	0	0	6
ENTERTAIN TONITE		0	0	3	4	3	0	0	0	2
PEOPLE'S COURT		0	3	0	0	0	0	6	0	1
<u>VARIETY/VIDEO</u>										
MTV (Cable TV)		0	0	0	0	0	0	59	6	6
<u>GAME SHOWS</u>										
WHEEL OF FORTUNE		20	19	8	19	18	0	6	18	14
FAMILY FEUD		0	6	4	9	5	9	0	0	5
LOVE CONNECTION		0	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
<u>SPORTS</u>										
FOOTBALL		15	0	0	6	0	4	6	6	4
<u>N OF CHILDREN WHO VIEWED TV =</u>										
		(20)	(32)	(24)	(32)	(22)	(23)	(17)	(17)	(187)

(a) CARTOONS

If we see that certain programs are being watched by significantly higher percentages of some classes/schools but not others, then we would be more likely to conclude that peer group social pressure has a greater affect on children's television program preferences, than do children's psycho-social developmental traits, as described by Piaget.

On the other hand, if we find that specific shows are equally popular among all or most of the classes and schools, then we can assume that characteristics

associated with children's psycho-social development (particularly their stage of cognitive development) have a greater affect on television viewing preferences than do social characteristics associated with children's peer groups, as defined by school/class membership. The figures in Table 4.9 support the former conclusion.

We see that in both the New York and London samples, for each television program category, one or two programs are clearly much more popular among the students than are all the other listed programs in the category. Yet, the percentage of each New York class and each London school who claimed to view these highly rated programs varies considerably by class and school. For example, in New York, The Cosby Show had the highest total percentage of viewers (41%) than any other program. Yet the figures ranged from a low of 18% for the two Manhasset classes and class 4-5 to a high of 69% for class 5-1. In London, the most popular show was the variety show, Lenny Henry. Thirty one percent of the total respondents watched this program, yet the percentage of viewers ranged from 18% at Freetowns to a high of 48% for Yarbine. We see similar percentage fluctuations for each and every top rated program in each and every program category, both in New York and London.

This rather wide percentage dispersion of program viewers seems to confirm Medrich's findings that peer pressure does account for a significant portion of the variance of children's program choices since each class/school appears to have its own viewing audience for each television program. While one show can be viewed by

a very high percentage of students in one class, that same show might be much less popular in another class in the same school. This evidence seems to indicate that peer groups, as defined by children's classmates, do exert some degree of influence on children's program choices.

Since the New York figures appear to be more complete and more accurate indicators of children's program preferences than the London figures (due to the higher response rate in New York), we should make a number of additional, specific comments about this sub-table, with regard to viewing preferences of children and scheduling strategies of the networks for attracting children to particular programs.

Lead-in Theories of Viewing Preferences

Sitcoms and cartoons attracted the highest percentage of viewers than did all other types of programs. Nearly all of these very popular programs were on either channel 4, 5, or 11; the other four New York broadcast channels did not seem to attract many children. Apparently, channels 4, 5 and 11 were so popular with children because much of their programming was targeted to this particular audience and/or because these channels had especially good lead-in programs which carried what would otherwise be lower-rated shows.

"Lead-in" theories of television viewing choices do not appear to be very convincing explanations for children's viewing behavior, since these theories imply that children are passive viewers whereas the data seem to prove otherwise. While most television programs were

viewed on only three channels, we will see that many children did switch channels if there were particular programs they really wanted to watch. Most children, in fact, did not continue to watch very many shows on any one channel; rather, a great deal of discriminate channel switching occurred during the course of the viewing period.

If we examine the New York TV listings in Table 4.9, we see that 33% of the sample saw Voltron, 40% saw Heathcliff and 25% saw Little House on the Prairie. A very large number of children indicated in the questionnaire that they saw all 3 programs.

Voltron and Heathcliff were aired from 3:30 to 4:30. At 4:30, many children switched to channel 5 for He-Man, and then switched back to channel 11 at 5:00 for Little House on the Prairie. At 6:00, approximately the same percentage of children who continued to stay tuned to this same channel for the Smurf movie decided to switch to channel 5 for Three's Company and One Day At a Time. At 7:30, a large number of children tuned to channel 2 for Wheel of Fortune, but then at 8:00, switched to channel 4 and stayed tuned to this channel for two consecutive hours of sitcoms.

This kind of program analysis cannot show whether children would have purposively searched for and watched all these very same programs, irrespective of the channel they were aired on, or whether children were watching some of these programs simply because of lead-in factors.

This analysis also must accept the possibility that at least some children did not view all these programs,

although the follow-up interviews showed that many children appeared to be very strongly committed to all, or most, of these highly rated television shows. Many children reported that they "hurried right home in order to see 'my' programs (Heathcliff and Voltron).\" In fact, many of the children who claimed to see Heathcliff and Voltron in the afternoon also claimed to have seen these same shows in the morning before leaving for school.

Clearly, then, many children have very strong preferences and predilections for specific programs. Children appear to be active, purposeful viewers, in the sense that they use TV listings and plan and structure their daily activities around the television programs they like the most. They talk about television with their peers and will watch the specific programs popular with their peers. Children search out programs that they want to see and change channels frequently in order to see these programs. An important operational sign of this purposefulness will be shown in Chapter 7, where we will see that many children in New York and in London seem to eschew outdoor playing in order to watch "their" programs. It is reasonable to conclude that when specific TV programs support important functional needs of children, whether those needs are intrinsically related to the program being watched or whether they are related to the behavior of their peers, children will make distinct efforts to watch these programs.

Academic and Social Correlates of Television Program Preferences

Medrich et al. (1982); Schramm (1961); Himmelweit et

al. (1958) and others have found some evidence to suggest that differential viewing preferences exist among ethnic, racial and gender groups. There is also some consensus among educators that high academic achievers will tend to view more "educational" programs than will low achievers. This study provides further evidence tending to support some, but not all, of these conclusions.

We will see that 1) Programs in specific categories were more popular among Blacks and Hispanics than Whites and Other Non-English speakers; 2) New York males were more likely to watch cartoons than New York females; but 3) Males and females in both New York and London were equally likely to view all other types of programs, and 4) High academic achievers were just as likely to view most, but not all, program categories as were average and low achievers.

To test these four hypotheses, frequency tables were constructed which alternately show the percentage of interviewed students who viewed at least one program in each of the program categories by students' reading level, race/ethnicity, and gender.

Program Preferences and Reading Ability

There is a general belief among many educators that high academic achievers tend to watch high-brow television programs such as news/documentaries, feature films and children's educational programs while low academic achievers tend to watch low-brow entertainments such as cartoons, sitcoms, variety shows, and game shows. High-brow shows are typically either non-fictional programs

and/or demand a fairly high amount of attention from the viewer. Their aims are mainly to provide information or instruction to the viewer. Low-brow shows are usually non-fictional programs typically lasting for a half hour. They are very fast moving and do not demand very much attention from the viewer, since the plots, when they exist, are not very complicated. The aim of these programs is purely to entertain the viewer.

Table 4.10 shows the percentage of interviewed London and New York reading level groups who viewed television program categories. The data presented in this table are somewhat ambiguous. They show that in each city, relatively small percentage viewing differences were found to exist between the three reading level groups. However, when categorical differences did exist, the poor readers were more likely to have viewed the programs in that category than were the better readers.

TABLE 4.10: PERCENTAGE OF INTERVIEWED LONDON AND NEW YORK
READING LEVEL GROUPS WHO VIEWED TELEVISION
PROGRAM CATEGORIES

<u>LONDON</u>			
<u>READING LEVEL</u>	<u>ABOVE AVERAGE</u>	<u>AVERAGE</u>	<u>BELOW AVERAGE</u>
<u>PROGRAM CATEGORIES</u>			
CARTOONS	17%	28%	24%
FEATURE FILMS	20	25	11
SITCOMS	29	25	28
VARIETY/VIDEO	14	25	28
SPORTS	2	8	0
DOCUMENTARY/NEWS	17	16	13
CHILDREN PROG	17	16	18
DRAMA SERIES	29	28	51
GAME SHOWS	5	8	8
MORNING NEWS	14	24	20
N =	(59)	(25)	(45)

<u>NEW YORK</u>			
<u>READING LEVEL</u>	<u>ABOVE AVERAGE</u>	<u>AVERAGE</u>	<u>BELOW AVERAGE</u>
<u>PROGRAM CATEGORIES</u>			
CARTOONS	48%	56%	50%
FEATURE FILMS	5	6	7
SITCOMS	46	40	79
VARIETY/VIDEO	13	6	0
SPORTS	5	2	7
DOCUMENTARY/NEWS	5	2	14
CHILDREN PROG	5	2	7
DRAMA SERIES	48	42	57
GAME SHOWS	3	15	7
MORNING CARTOONS	30	33	43
MORNING NEWS	3	0	7
N =	(61)	(52)	(14)

In London, the percentage of children who viewed the afternoon cartoon, sitcom, sports, documentary/news, children's programs, game shows and morning news programs, did not differ by more than 10 percentage points for any two reading level categories. In New York, the percentage of children who viewed the afternoon cartoon, feature films, sports, documentary/news, children's programs, and

morning news, did not differ by more than 10 percentage points for any two reading level categories. For these program categories, therefore, we cannot say that reading level is strongly associated with children's viewing preferences.

But other program viewing categories did appear to be more popular with either high or low reading level groups, however, good and poor readers in New York did not always prefer the same types of programs as their London counterparts.

In New York, the largest percentage differences occurred in the sitcom, dramatic series and morning cartoon categories. Of the below-average readers, 79% saw sitcoms as opposed to 40% and 46% of the average and above-average readers, respectively. Similarly, 57% of the below-average readers saw dramatic series, as compared with 42% and 48% of the average and above-average readers, respectively. And 43% of the below-average readers saw morning cartoons, as compared with 33% and 30%, of the average and above-average readers, respectively. In London, we find much smaller percentage variations among the three reading levels in most program categories than we find in New York, but in New York, when a relatively large percentage difference was found to exist, the largest percentages of viewers were usually below average readers.

Among the below-average readers in London, 51% watched drama series, as contrasted with 28% of the average and 29% of the above-average readers and 28% of the below-average readers saw variety/videos as compared

with 25% of the average and 14% of the above average readers.

The data in Table 4.10 presents rather inconclusive evidence concerning the micro-motivational effects of reading ability on children's program viewing preferences. The strongest statement that we can make is that low academic achievers do seem more likely to view cartoon shows than do high academic achievers, since we saw fairly consistent evidence of this viewing behavior in both London and New York.

We also saw that when there were different viewing preferences for specific program categories among some reading level groups, the low academic achievers nearly always had the highest viewing percentages. In some cases high percentages of low educational achievers watched high-brow shows while at other times, they watched low-brow shows. We cannot, therefore, conclude that certain high-brow programs are more popular with good readers and low-brow programs are more popular with poor readers, as many educators seem to believe.

In Chapter 5, we will see that reading level is not associated with the amount of time children watch television. We must also remember that the findings presented in Table 4.10 are based on the percentage of children by reading level who watch specific types of programs, not the amount of time children watched these types of programs. It is possible that if we broke each program category into 30 minute viewing time categories and if we had a large enough sample to produce reliable findings, we might very well find significant effects

between program viewing and reading level.

There is, then, rather inconclusive evidence concerning any possible associations between children's reading level and program preferences. High academic achievers, as measured by reading level, appeared to be just as likely to view most types of television programs as low achievers. However, we have also seen that some program categories, such as sitcoms and cartoons in New York and dramatic series in both London and New York tended to draw significantly larger percentages of below average readers than average and above average readers.

While the data and interviews do not contain sufficient information to explain why poor readers apparently are more attracted to certain types of television programs than better readers, future researchers might very well find some answers through intensive program content analysis.

Program Preferences and Race/Ethnicity

Social scientists (including this researcher) have always had difficulty analyzing the independent macro-structural effects of socio-economic status, race and ethnicity, and cultural background on children's use of video media because these attributes are closely associated.

Carey (1965); Greenberg and Dervin (1972) and Eastman and Liss (1980) concluded that ethnic minority children tend to prefer different kinds of programs than do their White counterparts, favoring programs which depict families or feature characters of their own ethnic or

racial group. These findings support the conclusion of Atkin et al. (1979) who believe that viewers select television programs on the basis of their beliefs, values, and predispositions. Yet, these conclusions do not explain why much higher percentages of minority students in this study watched white, middle-class family sitcoms and drama series than did Whites.

We saw in Table 4.7 that Blacks tended to watch television more often than did all other ethnic groups represented in this study. Table 4.11 shows the percentage of interviewed London and New York ethnic groups who viewed television program categories. This table complements Table 4.7 by showing that Blacks (and to a somewhat lesser extent, Hispanics), were much more likely to view specific program categories than were children of other ethnic groups.

TABLE 4.11: PERCENTAGE OF INTERVIEWED LONDON AND NEW YORK
ETHNIC GROUPS WHO VIEWED TELEVISION PROGRAM
CATEGORIES (8)

<u>LONDON</u>				
<u>ETHNIC GROUPS</u>	<u>WHITE- ENGLISH</u>	<u>BLACK- ENGLISH</u>	<u>OTHER NON-ENG</u>	
<u>PROGRAM CATEGORIES</u>				
CARTOONS	25%	50%	21%	
FEATURE FILMS	30	0	8	
SITCOMS	12	50	40	
VARIETY/VIDEO	13	33	26	
SPORTS	4	0	2	
DOCUMENTARY/NEWS	12	17	21	
CHILDREN PROG	12	17	21	
DRAMA SERIES	26	83	45	
GAME SHOWS	7	33	11	
MORNING NEWS	17	0	21	
N =	(107)	(6)	(53)	
<u>NEW YORK</u>				
<u>ETHNIC GROUPS</u>	<u>WHITE- ENGLISH</u>	<u>BLACK- ENGLISH</u>	<u>HISPANIC</u>	<u>OTHER NON-ENG</u>
<u>PROGRAM CATEGORIES</u>				
P.M. CARTOONS	43%	54%	71%	48%
FEATURE FILMS	8	4	5	3
SITCOMS	37	67	48	48
VARIETY/VIDEO	12	17	0	3
SPORTS	4	4	5	3
DOCUMENTARY/NEWS	8	4	5	0
CHILDREN PROG	8	4	0	0
DRAMA SERIES	53	67	38	27
GAME SHOWS	2	8	24	9
A.M. NEWS	2	4	0	3
A.M. CARTOONS	24	38	48	30
N =	(49)	(24)	(21)	(33)

The figures in this table show that higher percentages of New York and London Blacks watched cartoons, sitcoms and drama series than did Whites and Other ethnic groups and that higher percentages of Hispanics watched cartoons and game shows than did Whites and Other ethnic group members. Conversely, Whites were somewhat more likely to view feature films, documentaries and children's programs than were Blacks and Hispanics.

For all other program categories, no significant percentage differences were found to exist between the various ethnic/racial groups. These findings are consistent with the findings of Medrich, Schramm, and other previously cited researchers, who found significant program viewing differences between ethnic/racial groups.

This study and other researchers have shown that Blacks, and ethnic minorities in general, tend to be heavier television users and tend to have more favorable attitudes towards cartoons, sitcoms and dramatic series than do members of other ethnic groups. But researchers have not been able to explain why higher percentages of Blacks as compared with Whites and Other ethnic groups, appear to be particularly attracted to these specific program categories nor does the data in this study explain why higher percentages of New York Whites as compared with Blacks and Hispanics view feature films, news/documentaries and children's programs.

Nonetheless, we can note that sitcoms and to a lesser extent, drama series, are essentially escapist entertainments. They portray idealized middle-class families whose conflicts are resolved to everyone's satisfaction within a 30 or 60 minute time frame. It is not hard to theorize that while many lower-class, minority children, especially children from one-parent households, could not easily identify with the characters or plots of these shows, they might be more likely to want to imagine themselves as members of such families than would middle-class White and Other Non-English groups, whose families already bear some resemblance to the families depicted on

the sitcom and drama series shows. Blacks and Hispanics might be particularly attracted to these types of shows because the programs represent very attractive, very ideal, very palatable and very artificial versions of reality; a reality that might particularly excite the imagination of minority children because of the gap between what is shown on the television screen and what is experienced at home.

This type of fantasizing might or might not be harmful to children. But the fact that such fantasizing seems to occur suggests that specific television programs have the power to fulfill specific sets of micro-motivational psychological needs as well as macro-structural social needs common to specific ethnic and racial groups. Both types of needs interact with each other to produce any given behavior. We might, therefore, assume that certain types of TV programs are more functionally related to the needs of certain ethnic and racial groups than to others.

Program Preferences and Gender

Eastman and Liss (1980) showed that boys and girls do have different viewing preferences. They found that boys preferred western and adventure shows while girls preferred musicals and family sitcoms.

The viewing preferences of the total sample of males and females were compared. We saw either no, or insignificant, percentage differences for each of the program categories. The largest difference was recorded for morning news programs, where the proportion of males

watching this program category was nine percentage points higher than among females.

However, some differences were found when we examined the London and New York male-female viewing preferences in

TABLE 4.12: PERCENTAGE OF INTERVIEWED LONDON AND NEW YORK
GENDER GROUPS WHO VIEWED TELEVISION PROGRAM
CATEGORIES

<u>LONDON</u>		
<u>SEX</u>	<u>MALE</u>	<u>FEMALE</u>
<u>PROGRAM CATEGORIES</u>		
CARTOONS	23%	26%
FEATURE FILMS	25	19
SITCOMS	27	18
VARIETY/VIDEO	25	12
SPORTS	4	2
DOCUMENTARY/NEWS	16	14
CHILDREN PROG	16	14
DRAMA SERIES	35	34
GAME SHOWS	6	12
MORNING NEWS	24	12
N =	(81)	(85)

<u>NEW YORK</u>		
<u>SEX</u>	<u>MALE</u>	<u>FEMALE</u>
<u>PROGRAM CATEGORIES</u>		
CARTOONS	61%	44%
FEATURE FILMS	5	6
SITCOMS	46	48
VARIETY/VIDEO	5	11
SPORTS	9	0
DOCUMENTARY/NEWS	7	3
CHILDREN PROG	4	4
DRAMA SERIES	43	49
GAME SHOWS	5	11
MORNING CARTOONS	43	24
MORNING NEWS	5	0
N =	(56)	(71)

In London, differences between boys and girls were non-existent or very small (the largest male-female

percentage differences were for the morning news and variety/video categories where the proportion of males who watched these shows was, respectively, 12 and 13 percentage points more than among females) and for all but two program categories in the New York sample. In New York, 61% of the males saw afternoon cartoons as compared with only 44% of the females, and 43% of the males saw morning cartoon shows as compared with 24% of the females.

An analysis of the program content of New York and London cartoon shows, in particular, and television programming in general, might help explain these different male/female viewing patterns.

London broadcasters appear to schedule much less violent television programming than their New York counterparts. Horror movies, for instance, are never shown on any London channel before midnight, while these types of movies are often shown during prime time periods in New York. Similarly, London cartoon shows are typically much less violent, much less aggressive, and much more subtle and sensitive to children's social, emotional and cognitive development than are most New York cartoon shows, especially the two most popular New York cartoon shows, Voltron and Heathcliff. However, we should bear in mind that the content of nearly all cartoon shows are intrinsically fantastic, stylized illusions of reality. Whether their themes are primarily educational or violent, cartoons obviously have a very strong appeal to children and appear to gratify some of their emotional and creative needs.

Since there is a growing body of social science

literature supporting the view that boys are much more attracted to fast moving, action oriented stories and television programs (Greenfield, 1984; Eastman and Liss, 1980), we should not be surprised to find that New York males are more attracted to cartoon shows than are New York females. Yet, cartoon shows in London, which are fairly subdued and reflective as compared with New York cartoon shows, are equally popular with both sexes (23% of the London males saw cartoons as compared with 26% of the London females).

If we accept Noble's premise that cartoon shows can provide children with healthy and gratifying fantasy and escapist entertainment, then clearly, New York females are being deprived of important emotional outlets and support. If we believe that New York cartoons are violent and harmful to children, then we should be concerned about the very high numbers of children, both male and female, who view these programs. If both these contentions are true, then New York television should start to produce cartoon programming which would appeal more equally to both boys and girls; that is, non-violent, sensitive and imaginative cartoon shows, as is done in London.

SUMMARY

Nielsen's viewing figures show that children watch approximately four hours of television each day. This study found that daily mean viewing times varied from 1 1/2 to 3 hours, depending on the day of the week, programming characteristics and environmental factors. Sunday viewing figures suggested that when children had large amounts of discretionary time, they limited

themselves to (or were able to tolerate) a maximum of three hours of viewing.

Both the micro-motivational and macro-structural components of the uses-gratifications perspective enabled us to analyze how viewing preferences were made. The viewing figures presented in this chapter suggest that viewing times are associated with 1) Ownership and usage of VCRs and ownership of a television in the respondents' bedrooms (owners and users of these items tended to have higher viewing levels than did non-owners and non-users); 2) Gender (males tended to watch more TV than females); and 3) Ethnicity (Blacks watched higher levels of TV than all other ethnic groups).

On the other hand, TV viewing times were not associated with ownership of computers, computer and video games, cable TV and multiple household TVs. We concluded that the mere presence of these video related items in the home neither displaces nor reinforces TV viewing.

Most children had access to TV listings and used these viewing guides daily. These findings led us to presume that children are active television consumers who carefully plan and choose their daily viewing activities. The high incidence of purposeful channel switching further attests to their desire to search for and find satisfying programs. On the other hand, we saw that many children preferred to passively watch uninteresting programs rather than not watch TV.

The active/passive nature of children's viewing behavior was most apparent when we observed the percentage of New York and London viewers who saw morning cartoon and

news shows. In London, where no morning cartoon shows were aired, 17% of the sample watched news programs. In New York, where cartoons and news shows were broadcast, 32% of the sample watched cartoons but only 2% viewed the news programs. Presumably, higher percentages of London children would have decided to view morning TV in general, and cartoons in particular, if cartoons were broadcast in the morning.

Poor readers were just as likely to watch most program categories as were above-average readers. However, somewhat higher percentages of the poor readers in New York and London watched cartoon shows than did above-average readers.

In New York and London, Blacks were more likely to view cartoons, sitcoms and drama series than were children in all other ethnic groups. We hypothesized that these types of programs might be more functionally related to the needs of Blacks, than to children in the other ethnic groups.

And finally, we saw that London males and females were just as likely to view all program categories, although somewhat more males viewed morning news and variety/video shows than females. In New York, the only viewing differences were in the cartoon category where much higher percentages of males viewed cartoons than did females. We speculated that New York females would have been more interested in cartoons if these shows were not so violent. In London, where cartoon shows are more philosophic and sedate than they are in New York, girls were just as likely to watch as were boys.

CHAPTER FIVE
TELEVISION AND VIDEO USAGE AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

This chapter explores the relationship between television and other video items on children's academic achievement. The data will show that there is a very low association between children's TV viewing levels and reading ability. We will see, however, that when we examined how children watched TV, those who watched while doing homework were more likely to have lower reading levels than were children who did not work and view at the same time.

We will also discuss the relationship of computer and video game ownership to reading level. While there is a positive relationship between ownership of these items and reading ability, this relationship may be due to the association of video ownership with family status.

Most media "effects" studies can be problematic since it is difficult to determine whether viewing is in fact an antecedent variable. For example, it is hard to establish whether television viewing habits affect a child's academic achievement or whether the child's intellectual ability affects his television viewing habits. Likewise, whether exposure to violent TV programs increase children's aggressive behavior or whether aggressive children are likely to watch a large number of violent programs.

Another problem associated with media "effects" studies is the presence of television sets in nearly every home in the industrialized world, thereby eliminating the

possibility of recruiting comparable groups of children with and without exposure to the experimental variable, television.

And lastly, media "effects" studies are usually designed to measure immediate or short-term effects of television on children, ignoring the possibility either that the short term effects could disappear over time, or that unforeseen effects might eventually appear over time. In the case of most video hardware and software items, other than television, these items have not been in children's homes long enough to have any great influence on such a stable trait as reading level. Longitudinal or panel studies, designed to overcome these problems, generally introduce maturational effects or sampling errors which greatly reduce the validity of the findings.

Although media studies have not been able to establish cause-effect relationships between television viewing and video usage and various measures of academic achievement, media studies are capable of showing whether there is any relationship between these variables. This study does not, therefore, intend to assess the present or future effects of new video-related items on children's cognitive and social development. However, it does provide data which could be very useful to social scientists interested in pursuing this line of research, since it includes both quantitative and qualitative data describing how children presently integrate new activities into their leisure time routines and how these new routines impact on various aspects of their lives.

The research design employed for this study permitted

control for many extraneous variables which can, and often do, reduce the validity of media studies. Since the questionnaire was administered to all New York and London students on the same day, many intervening factors, such as weather conditions, school activity schedules, and television schedules appear to be adequately eliminated. The interviews were conducted over a week but most children in the same class were interviewed on the same day.

Previous Research: Television and Children's Cognitive and Social Development

There is disagreement on the question of television's effects on academic achievement. Greenfield (1984) and Noble (1979) believe that television viewing can help stimulate a young child's imagination and sense of creativity. In particular, Greenfield found that television enables slower learners to develop essential reading skills which are not being learned through the print media.

Winick and Wehrenberg (1982), Singer and Singer (1983), and Stanford (1983) tend to agree that television can be an educationally rewarding experience for children if children are carefully supervised by their parents and if parents question their children about the programs they have seen. The data in Chapter 8 will show that most children watch TV in the presence of their parents but only a small number have discussions about the television programs.

Some researchers have found that heavy television viewing is associated with comparatively high academic

improvement for specific sub-groups, such as low I.Q. children (Himmelweit et al. 1958). Schramm et al. (1961) found that young children with high I.Q. scores tended to engage in high levels of television viewing, but this interest in television sharply declined when the children reached their teens. The researchers cautiously concluded that television seems to benefit the duller viewers (at early ages) more than it benefits the average viewer and that television benefits the bright child relatively more than the average child. They also noted that while some reading and vocabulary advantages accrued to heavy viewers, as compared with light viewers, at the outset of their schooling, reading score differences between these two groups tended to disappear by the sixth grade, thus demonstrating the short-lasting effects of television viewing on academic achievement.

On the other side of this issue are those researchers who have found negative relationships between the amount of children's television viewing and academic achievement. Ridley-Johnson et al. (1982:296) discovered a small negative relationship between the amount of television viewing and school achievement although this relationship was truer for reading ability than math or science school grades. He also found a "predominantly weak, negative relationship between the amount of television viewing and I.Q." This latter finding was consistent with the results reported for older adolescents by Lyle and Hoffman (1972) and Schramm et al. (1969).

Morgan and Gross (1980) and Fetler (1982) also found that viewing had fairly strong negative correlations with

reading comprehension and I.Q. Interestingly, in another study conducted over a three-year period, Morgan found that students who were heavy viewers of television tended to read more but comprehend less than lighter viewers. Over this three-year period, those who remained heavy viewers ended up reading more than those who were light viewers, indicating that reading habits tend to remain fairly stable over time. Morgan could not explain these findings, but he did notice that the heavy viewers-heavy readers preferred less serious reading materials such as magazines, popular novels, mysteries than did the light viewers-light readers.

And finally, there are researchers who failed to find any significant effects of television viewing on children's academic development (Anderson and Maguire, 1978; Childers and Ross, 1973). The findings which will be presented in this study tend to confirm the conclusions of those studies which have not found any significant association, whether they be positive or negative, between the amount of television viewing and reading level. However, we will see that television viewing can interfere with other educationally useful activities. We will see in Table 5.2, for example, that children who frequently did homework while watching television tended to have lower reading levels than did children who worked with the television off.

Television and VCR Viewing and Reading Level

Table 5.1 shows the association of total television viewing time by reading level.

TABLE 5.1: TOTAL TELEVISION AND VCR VIEWING BY READING LEVEL (a)

<u>READING LEVEL</u> <u>TELEVIEWING TIME</u>	<u>ABOVE</u> <u>AVERAGE</u>	<u>AVERAGE</u>	<u>BELOW</u> <u>AVERAGE</u>
1 HOUR OR LESS	33%	33%	31%
1-2 HOURS	30	30	29
2-3 HOURS	18	14	17
3 HOURS OR MORE	19	23	24
N =	<u>100%</u> (120)	<u>100%</u> (77)	<u>100%</u> (59)

Gamma = .048

(a) See Appendix 8 for coding procedures for reading levels.

Table 5.1 shows that there was no association between amount of television viewing of nine-to-eleven year old children and reading ability. It should be noted, however, that while the zero-order correlation of reading level by total television viewing time was very close to zero, we do see some evidence that in London, higher reading levels were associated with lower amounts of television/VCR viewing (the Gamma of this crosstabulation in London = - .201, while in New York, higher reading levels were very weakly associated with higher reading levels. The New York Gamma is +.102).

The most likely explanation for these correlation differences can be discerned from the London interviews and a careful examination of the distribution of VCRs among the four parent occupational status categories. We should also remember that in Chapter 3, we saw that there was a very strong, positive relationship between reading level and occupational status. A fairly substantial number of children who attended the two London upper middle class

schools indicated that they and their parents did not have a very high regard for television viewing in general and VCRs in particular. Many children said that their parents regarded television viewing "as a waste of time." These negative attitudes toward television viewing were reflected in the relatively low percentages of VCR ownership among the children who attended the two high socio-economic status London schools, Freetowns and Abbey Melton (34% and 40%, respectively), as opposed to the very high percentage of VCR owners (71%) who attended the two low socio-economic status schools, Mineplain and Yarbine.(1)

Since lower status parents were much more likely to own VCRs (in London, only) and also have children with lower reading levels than were higher status parents, and since VCR owners tended to have higher total viewing times than non-owners, it should come as no surprise that in London, higher levels of television/VCR viewing was also associated with lower reading levels. (Refer to Chapter 2 and Appendix 9 for the table of reading level by parents' occupational status and notes on reading level and occupational status).

In New York, ownership of VCRs was fairly evenly distributed among all but the lowest occupational status categories, so occupational status and VCR ownership was not as likely to affect children's reading levels and total television/VCR viewing times as they were in London. The very weak Gamma between children's reading level and

television/VCR viewing time than the Gamma that we saw for the London sample because VCRs were more evenly distributed among the occupational status groups in New York than in London. Furthermore, it would probably be safe to say that if VCRs were more evenly distributed among the four London occupational status groups, as they were in New York, the London Gamma for children's reading level by total television/VCR viewing would be similarly low.

Children's Viewing Behavior and Academic Achievement

The total amount of time children spend watching television does not appear to affect children's reading levels, but the way in which a child views television could conceivably affect the quality of his work and study habits which could, in turn, affect his reading level.

Item 14 on the questionnaire asked the children, "How often do you do your homework while you are watching TV?" One would have expected a large number of children to indicate that they often do their homework while watching TV. In fact, only 14% of the entire sample answered "almost always", 21% answered "some days", and 65% answered "hardly ever". Even more surprisingly, only 3% of the children who were interviewed indicated that they watched television while doing their homework on the previous day. Possibly, many of the children considered this question to be threatening and decided to give a "socially acceptable" response rather than an honest response.

On the other hand, the interviews clearly revealed

that most children in the sample had fairly common routines with regard to homework and these routines included doing homework before going outside to play or watching television. In response to the interview question, "Tell me everything that you did yesterday when you came home from school," a majority of the students in New York said, "I came home from school, did my homework, and then (italics added) went outside to play (or watched television)."

One hour was the average amount of time spent on homework for the New York sample. According to several London teachers, the Inner London Education Authority actively discourages teachers from giving homework to young children. This policy was obviously adhered to because only 21% of London children indicated in the interview that they did school work the previous day, and more than half of these children were in the same school.

Table 5.2 shows the impact of simultaneously doing homework and watching television on reading achievement. This table is based on questionnaire responses rather than interview responses.

TABLE 5.2: READING LEVEL BY FREQUENCY OF SIMULTANEOUSLY DOING HOMEWORK AND WATCHING TELEVISION

<u>FREQUENCY OF HOMEWORK AND TV</u>	<u>HARDLY EVER</u>	<u>SOMETIMES</u>	<u>ALMOST ALWAYS</u>
<u>READING LEVEL</u>			
ABOVE AVERAGE	54%	32%	38%
AVERAGE	29	35	33
BELOW AVERAGE	17	32	29
N =	<u>100%</u> (213)	<u>100%</u> (74)	<u>100%</u> (45)

GAMMA = .285

Homework is one of the only after-school activities that most children are coerced into doing. Parents and teachers believe that homework is a gratifying activity because children will get better grades if they do this work. Most children do not see this activity as gratifying any of their needs, rather, they consider homework to be a necessary and abhorrent chore. These contradictory attitudes influence the way children do homework, particularly when many children simultaneously watch TV and do homework in order to minimize the unpleasantness of this task. Unfortunately, this dual arrangement appears to retard the child's educational development.

Table 5.2 shows that among children claiming they hardly ever do their homework while watching television, 54% were above-average readers as opposed to 17% who were below average readers, for a 37 percentage point difference. In the "sometimes" category, 32% were above average and 32% were below average while in the "almost always" category, 38% were above average and 29% were below average readers.

These figures provide strong evidence for the hypothesis that children who refrain from watching television while studying are much more likely to be better readers than are children who choose to simultaneously watch television and do schoolwork.

These findings and the data in Table 5.1 also seem to confirm Schramm's belief that children's cognitive development is not impeded by television use, per se. Rather, television viewing can become a dysfunctional activity when it competes with and/or displaces other activities (in the present case, homework) which appear to be important to a child's social and academic development. Thus, the level and type of parental supervision influencing a child's study habits might be mitigating any negative effects of television viewing on children's reading levels. The role of parental control and supervision in children's leisure time activities will be discussed in Chapter 8.

The New Video Media and Academic Achievement

As we have seen, television viewing does not appear to be directly related to a child's academic achievement. Now, we have to explore the possibility that ownership of the new video media, particularly computers and video/computer games, might be related to children's reading level.

Computer Ownership and Usage and Reading Level

During the last few years, schools have been introducing computer literacy courses for children as

young as eight years old. School districts have purchased millions of dollars worth of computers and many elementary schools in New York City have invested tens of thousands of dollars in computer labs. An article in The New York State Education Department's June 1986 newsletter, Learning in New York, stated that in 1985-86, New York State schools had one computer for every 29 pupils, a 50% increase from 1984-85. These huge expenditures on computer technology were approved by school officials and politicians, even though little, if any, empirical evidence demonstrated that computer literacy has any significant impact on children's reading or mathematics scores.

This researcher visited a number of computer facilities in New York schools, observed computer classes and spoke with several teachers who were in charge of computer labs. Some computer-related activities appeared to reinforce related educational skills. In one school, a computer lab teacher was about to introduce a word processing program to sixth grade pupils. Most children seemed to enjoy using the computers and appeared to be quite engrossed with their educational computer games.

While teachers expressed enthusiasm for the concept of "computer literacy", they did not seem to have a clear idea of how computer instruction could help children learn to read, write, or do math. In addition, they have not yet integrated computer software into the school curricula. Many teachers stated, "computers can teach children to think," but when asked how computers teach "thinking skills", most teachers could not convincingly

demonstrate how children acquired these skills.

If computer literacy courses do become integrated into elementary school curricula, then children who own a home computer would likely have a distinct academic advantage over children who do not own computers, for no other reason than that the computer owners will be able to practice computer skills at home and ultimately receive higher grades than those of the children who do not own a home computer. Also, if computer skills are, in fact, correlated with reading scores-as many teachers and parents believe-then children who own computers would also acquire higher reading scores than those non-computer owners.

Based upon the above line of reasoning, we now examine two key issues. First, whether children who own computers have higher reading scores than children who do not own computers. Second, since we have seen that reading level and computer ownership were positively associated with occupational status, whether we will also find that computer ownership continues to be associated with higher reading levels, even when we control for occupational status.

Pertaining to the first issue, a weak, positive relationship exists between reading level and ownership of computers. For the entire New York and London samples, the proportion of computer owners who were above-average readers was ten percentage points higher than the non-owners. Conversely, the proportion of non-owners who were below-average readers was eight percentage points higher than for the computer owners. The rather low Gamma (.18)

and low Chi square (3.6) suggest that the reliability of these rather small percentage differences might be questioned.

However, Table 5.3, shows that for each occupational status category, computer owners tended to have higher reading levels than do non-owners. (Note: For the 46 interviewed students at Freetowns school, the parents' occupational statuses could not be obtained, so these students have been omitted from Table 5.3. Nonetheless, we have good reasons to believe that the vast majority of these students were in fact from upper middle class backgrounds. We also know that 31% of the Freetowns students owned computers, as compared to only 13% of the London manual unskilled and skilled groups. Therefore, we can assume that the percentages in the London occupational status categories 3 and 4 for above average readers would be somewhat higher [with correspondingly higher gammas for these two categories] if we decided to include the Freetowns students).

TABLE 5.3: READING LEVEL BY COMPUTER OWNERSHIP CONTROLLING FOR PARENTS' OCCUPATIONAL STATUS

<u>OWNERSHIP-OF COMPUTERS</u>	<u>NON-OWNERS</u>				<u>OWNERS</u>			
<u>OCCUPATIONAL STATUS (a)</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>
<u>READING LEVEL</u>								
ABOVE AVERAGE	13%	30%	35%	49%	33%	50%	50%	58%
AVERAGE	33	26	32	39	22	50	36	36
BELOW AVERAGE	53	44	32	12	44	0	14	6
N =	100% (30)	100% (27)	100% (37)	100% (49)	100% (9)	100% (6)	100% (14)	100% (33)

(a) OCCUPATIONAL STATUS CATEGORIES:

1=Manual unskilled 3=White collar semi-skilled
 2=Manual skilled 4=White collar skilled professional

GAMMA (CATEGORY 1) = .264
 GAMMA (CATEGORY 2) = .590
 GAMMA (CATEGORY 3) = .329
 GAMMA (CATEGORY 4) = .188

Table 5.3 shows that computer owners' reading levels were substantially higher than non-owners', especially in the three lowest status categories. For the highest group, the difference between owners and non-owners was smaller.

These findings demonstrate that while children who owned computers tended to have higher reading levels than those of children who did not own computers, computer ownership is not likely to affect children's reading levels since, at the time of the survey, home computers had been in students' homes for only a short time and probably could not have had much of an impact on children's academic achievement.

While it is tempting to conclude from Table 5.3 that computer ownership and usage affect children's reading levels, we must also acknowledge that within each parent's

occupational status category, there exist many different sets of attitudes toward the media and towards social, economic and educational aspirations. It is entirely possible, and indeed probable, that parents who decided to purchase a computer for their children, irrespective of their occupational status, also believed that a computer would help their children receive better grades. This belief, rather than the computer, might have accounted for children's high reading scores.

SUMMARY

This study did not find any evidence to establish a direct causal link between television viewing and reading level. However, a number of variables, such as doing homework while viewing television, and parents' occupational status and attitudes toward television (in London), were indirectly related to a child's academic performance.

This study also found some evidence to confirm the hypothesis that ownership and use of computers is positively (if weakly) associated with higher reading levels. Since we have previously seen that ownership of computers was positively associated with parents' occupational status, and occupational status was positively associated with reading level, the link between computer ownership and reading level might be spurious. However, even for parents of the same occupational status, children who had computers were at a higher reading level. We mentioned the possibility that other, undefined sets of parental attitudes could be acting as further influences

on computer ownership and reading level.

At the present time, no evidence exists which shows that owning a computer has a significant impact on a child's academic performance. However, such a relationship might develop as computers become more important in school and industry. Since it has been demonstrated that ownership of a computer is now associated with parents' occupational status, then insuring equal access to this new technology may become a crucial issue since children from lower economic and social backgrounds could be deprived of important tools for academic and economic success.

If, on the other hand, we find that parental attitudes towards computers-and perhaps more importantly, parental attitudes towards their children's academic and social development-are more closely associated with higher reading levels than mere ownership of computers, as seems to be the case, then parents and educators should not be particularly concerned about purchasing a home computer or providing huge allocations for computer facilities in schools.

Future social science research should try to ascertain how parental attitudes and motivations towards children's educational achievement influence decisions to purchase video items.

CHAPTER SIX

THE INTEGRATION OF THE NEW VIDEO MEDIA INTO THE WORLD OF CHILDREN

Little scholarly research has been published on the relationship of computers, computer games, and video cassette recorders on children's television viewing and other leisure time activities in relation to their cognitive and social development. A major obstacle for researchers has been the relatively small number of children who own these video items and the very short time these items have been in children's homes, thereby precluding the comparative and longitudinal studies needed to posit causal links between video usage and social or cognitive development. Likewise, this same paucity of data explains why we know so little about how these new video devices are affecting children's family life in general, and, more specifically, their social interactions with siblings and parents. "Certainly, the proliferation of new communication technologies may affect the structure of communication in society and make available a greater range of choice for satisfying communication needs. New media uses may complement uses already studied" (Williams, Phillips and Lum, 1985:241).

This chapter will present some of the first quantitative and qualitative data about children's VCR usage as well as their use of computers and video and computer games. The data will describe and analyze how children integrate new video media into their leisure time activities. We will see that these video items have become, within a short period of time, fixtures in many

homes, blending into children's leisure-time routines. The data will also show that boys are more likely to own and use computers and computer/video games than are girls. The uses-gratifications approach will help us to understand why parents purchase these items for their children and why some children are more likely to use these items than others.

Video Cassette Recorders

Several estimates and projections of VCR ownership have been obtained from recent news sources, magazines and trade journals. While these figures reflect ownership estimates for either the general population or, in some cases, specific sub-groups, this study is targeted towards families with school-age children. Because different demographic groups are purchasing VCRs at different rates, ownership estimates for one group might not necessarily conform to estimates for other groups. While the VCR ownership figures applicable to this study do not conform to these other estimates (families with school-age children are much more likely to own VCRs than the general population), the cited figures do provide a basis for comparing VCR ownership of this particular sub-group to other groups.

Statistics published in the September, 1984 issue of Tomorrow show the increasing popularity of VCRs. "Nearly 3 million were sold in the first half of 1984. This figure was up 84% over the first half of the year. VCR penetration should hit 20% of American homes by the year end." In the same vein, the August 6, 1984 issue of

Newsweek estimated that "by 1987, one in three households will have a VCR". Television/Radio Age (July, 1984) predicted that by 1990, 55% of television households will have a VCR.

According to the January, 1984 Nielsen Report, " VCRs are more likely to be found in the homes of the college educated, between the ages of 35-49 and with incomes of \$20,000 or more and living in "A" sized [urban] communities. The average household playback time is 3.5 hours per week." A September, 1984 BBC report estimated that approximately 25% of British households owned VCRs. The present study found that as of December, 1984, 50% of the sampled London and New York families owned VCRs.

These cited ownership figures are an indication of the immense popularity of VCRs. But studies have not yet shown how families are using this powerful, new piece of video equipment. Therefore, the data presented in this chapter represents one of the first attempts to analyze how children learn to integrate VCRs into their daily leisure time routines.

VCRs gratify specific needs of parents and children but those needs are, at times, incompatible with each other. The interview and questionnaire responses will show that VCRs are enabling parents to exercise much greater control over their children's video usage and choices of video entertainment than ever before. This additional control deprives ostensible agents of control, such as the broadcast corporations and TV programmers of some power to influence what children will see.

However, many parents do not, or cannot exercise this

control. We will see, therefore, that greater access to innovative and stimulating VCR software is a double edged sword, since some children also appear to gain a new dimension of control and choice over access to x-rated VCR programming. As a result, there is evidence that children are becoming increasingly exposed to a wide array of violent and pornographic VCR tapes. The New York Times of May 18, 1987 states that several states now require video stores to display the M.P.A.A ratings on the tapes they rent.

This problem has apparently become so acute in Great Britain, that a special House of Lords committee was created to investigate the effects of video violence on children.(1) One of the preliminary findings of this report indicated that nearly 25% of all British nine-to-eleven year olds had seen four or more x-rated tapes without the knowledge or consent of their parents. Both the 1972 and 1985 N.I.M.H. reports on television and children's behavior tentatively concluded that heavy television viewing, especially of more violent content, can influence children's overt behavior.

Parents can rely on movie theaters to prohibit young children from seeing adult films. They can usually rely on television stations not to air "adult oriented" programs when children are awake. But parents are finding it increasingly difficult to control their children's access to hard and soft core pornography tapes which are accessible to youngsters in video shops and in the homes.

While the issue of the effects of pornographic/violent programs is not within the purview of

this study, this study is concerned with the uses and gratifications of media items and how and why children choose various kinds of video media. Pre-teens are naturally curious. This sense of curiosity is often directed towards just those topics that they are not allowed to discuss. While video technology enables many children to gain access to tapes that gratify this healthy sense of curiosity about the world, it also permits access to potentially harmful material that might interfere with children's social and psychological development. Most parents have not been able to reconcile these two, apparently incompatible, VCR functions. That is why the governments in England and the United States are developing legislation which will limit children's access to many kinds of tapes.

Children's Use of VCRs

VCRs as an Educational Tool

The interviews provided a wealth of information about the role of VCRs in the lives of children. We will see that they gratify many social, intellectual and cultural needs.

Perhaps the most interesting observation to emerge is that children appeared to use VCR tapes much as they used books. They carefully and purposively selected tapes, often in cooperation with their parents. In addition, the children usually viewed these tapes repeatedly, much as a parent might re-read a favorite book to a child or a child might re-read a favorite book alone. Overall, children willingly accepted and easily integrated VCRs into their

daily home activity routines.

Children who have access to a VCR also have access to a large number and variety of home-centered entertainment and instructional materials which could affect their cognitive development. New York State schools have obviously recognized the potential educational advantages of VCRs, since the number of VCRs in schools has increased by 43% over the 1985-86 figures, for a total of 16,000 VCRs.(2) Public libraries are loaning increasing numbers of tapes to the general public and the kinds of tapes becoming available to VCR owners include not only the purely recreational feature length films and foreign language films, but also "educational-instructional" tapes. If we consider VCRs to have educational and cultural, as well as recreational benefits, then children who own this video hardware might, over a period of time, acquire more social and educational skills, than children who do not presently own VCRs.

VCRs and Family Usage

While we have not seen any conclusive evidence which shows that owning and presumably using VCRs is either positively or negatively associated with children's academic ability, the interviews and questionnaires did provide data about how VCRs may change the ways children entertain themselves and the ways children and parents interact with one another.

Although approximately half of the respondents owned VCRs, only 30% of all respondents said they used their VCRs on the nights prior to their interviews. Most of the

children usually use their VCRs only on weekends, especially on Saturday nights when the whole family watches a feature length film rented expressly for that evening.- An article in the New York Times (November 11, 1984) confirms that most video rentals occur on Fridays and Saturdays. Since interviews were conducted only on weekdays and asked children about their video usage for only the previous day, the peak weekend VCR viewing days were not reflected in data obtained from the interviews.

On the questionnaire, 29% of the students with VCRs in their homes said that their parents hardly ever rent VCR tapes, 40% said that they sometimes rent tapes, while 30% said that they rent tapes fairly often. These responses closely paralleled a similar interview question asked of the VCR owners, where 24% of these respondents said that their parents do not rent VCR tapes.

In the interview, children were asked how their parents decided which films to rent for them. Seventy-three percent of the children said that their parents usually ask them which tape they should rent. Some children indicated that they often accompany their parents to the video rental store and choose their films by themselves. One boy who attended P.S. 103 said he "looked through a catalog." Children seemed to be exercising very similar kinds of selectivity in choosing and viewing VCR tapes as they do when choosing a library book or deciding which broadcast television program to watch by consulting some TV listing. VCRs, therefore, greatly expand the number of activity options available to children and also give children an added amount of control over the exercise

of these activity choices.

Children had very specific VCR tape preferences and the preferences were very similar in both New York and London. Responding to the interview question, "What is your favorite VCR tape?", 44% indicated that they preferred non-horror, feature films, followed by 22% for dramatic series tapes, 17% for cartoons, 9% for variety/music videos and 6% for horror films.

As a follow-up question, children were asked how many times they saw this favorite tape. The mean number of tape replays for this favorite tape was 11 times. Some children at first eagerly reported seeing their favorite tape "hundreds of times", but when pressed for a more specific number, they gave a much smaller, but presumably, more realistic number.

Clearly, the children's responses to this follow-up question are only rough approximations of actual viewing behavior, yet it is interesting to note that the New York mean number of re-viewings was only seven times while the London mean re-viewings was 14. It is possible that since London television had so much less "children oriented" programming (and less diversity in general) than New York television, London children relied more heavily on their VCRs as an entertainment supplement than did New York children.

This argument seems even more compelling when we refer back to Table 4.1 to compare the New York and London VCR viewing times. These figures showed that only 29% of the New York VCR owners used their VCRs during the interview period as compared with 49% of the London VCR

owners, and that these New York students used their VCRs for an average of only 60 minutes per day as compared with 113 minutes for the London students.

Just as the children and their parents were fairly active renters of VCR tapes, they were also fairly eager recorders of television programs. Seventy percent of the VCR owners said they usually tape television programs either "sometimes" or "fairly often", each week. Interestingly, the difference between the proportion of New York students and London students saying they never tape television programs was fairly large-14 percentage points. The relatively high number of children's television programs available to New Yorkers could explain why they do not feel as great a need to tape television programs as do Londoners.

Children were also asked to write on the questionnaire when they usually view the tapes they make. Thirty-four percent did not indicate any particular time and 12% specifically said, "Whenever nothing good is on." Apparently, these latter children play tapes whenever they are bored or whenever favorite television programs are not being aired. But, 28% said that they usually view these recorded tapes the next day or as soon as possible, and 26% indicated a definite time during the week, such as, on weekends.

For children who regularly record TV programs, taping television programs was apparently a very deliberate act, involving a fairly high degree of commitment to the taped programs. A large number of children efficiently incorporated VCRs into the structure of their leisure time

by setting aside specific times to record and then view television programs not seen when originally aired.

For the children in this study, traditional patterns of television and leisure time activities were obviously altered by VCRs. Many children were maximizing the advantages of the new VCR technology to tape programs for future use, thus freeing some of their time previously locked into broadcast television.

VCRs permitted flexible use of time, but they also allowed children to see television programs that they would not usually be allowed to watch because of the program's content or broadcast hour.

For one London boy, VCR technology helped solve a major problem he was having with horror film nightmares. He proudly recalled how one day, "I taped a horror film that was shown at night and watched it in the daytime so I wouldn't get a nightmare." Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of child development (1979) suggests that this kind of ingenuity and adaptability is typical of the process by which any new media becomes assimilated into the lives of people; their original uses and functions are often adapted to meet an individual's specific needs. In this case, a child customized his VCR to gratify an idiosyncratic need.

Within a short time, children have managed to effectively integrate VCR technology into their lives. The data in this chapter suggest the onset of substantial changes in the ways children allot their leisure time as they become more accustomed to using VCRs. As children become more familiar with VCRs, they will continue to

invent ways to gratify many kinds of needs that are not now being gratified (Williams et al.,1985).

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Computers

The figures in Chapter 3 showed that 32% of the total respondents owned a computer, but 37% of the New York sample owned computers as opposed to only 26% of the London sample. Interview responses showed that 80 children used their computer the previous day to play video/computer games, while only one boy in London said that he used it as a word processor and one other London boy said that the computer was used for programming purposes. It is, therefore, reasonable to describe computers for children in this age group as being a sophisticated and expensive toy rather than a strictly academic or educational aid.

It is not surprising that children use computers primarily for non-educational purposes. Unlike video games, educational software is relatively expensive and is not meant to be used again after the child masters the skills it is intended to teach. These kinds of educational software are more appropriate in a classroom setting where one program can be used by hundreds of children, year after year.

Since nine-to-eleven year olds do not know how to type (the schools teach typing in the Intermediate and High Schools) and generally are not assigned much more than a few pages of creative writing each week, the word processing function of a computer might not be viewed as an essential skill to be taught in elementary schools.

And very few computer owners, whether they are children or adults, ever use their computers to write programs. In fact, of all the possible uses that computers can have for children, the most logical one is that of a game machine.

Of the 19 children who had a fairly accurate estimate of their computer time use for the previous day (62 children could not remember exactly how much time they used the computer during the previous day), 47% said that they used it for 30 minutes or less, 42% said that they used it between 30-60 minutes and only 11% said that they used it for 1 hour or more. The large number of children who said that they used their computers during the previous day but could not remember how much time they devoted to their computers seems to confirm the experiences of many adult computer users who say that they become very engrossed with their computers and tend to lose track of time while working.

Computer and Video Games

Children do not easily distinguish between computer and video games; they appear to be used interchangeably. While computer games are possibly more sophisticated and academically oriented than are video games, it appeared from the interviews and perusals of computer and video game catalogs that both types of games employ the same fast-moving graphics and violent themes. Most children interviewed said they preferred to use video games available in video arcades, rather than the more "intellectually oriented" games generally available for computers. However, we will see in Chapter 7 that

children frequent video arcades at least as much for social reasons (to meet their friends) as to use the games.

For the entire sample, 57% owned either computer or video games. The average game owner had seven games, but this figure does not include the 62 children who owned video games but could not remember the exact number of games owned.

Two items on the questionnaire asked the children to indicate how much time they usually play video games on weekdays and Saturdays in the following terms: less than one hour, between 1-2 hours or more than 2 hours. Children were verbally told to check the "less than 1 hour" box if they usually do not play with their games.

From these responses, we see that there was a sizable increase in estimated game playing time on Saturdays as compared with weekdays. On weekdays, 63% of the 244 respondents played video/computer games for 1 hour or less, 23% played between 1-2 hours, and 14% played for more than 2 hours. On Saturdays, 36% of the respondents said that they usually played for 1 hour or less, 27% played between 1-2 hours, and 37% played for more than 2 hours. This reported increase in game playing time is probably due to the greater amount of leisure time available on weekends as opposed to weekdays.

The interview data for weekday video/computer game playing provided more information about children's video game use than was obtained through the questionnaire. Fifty-six percent of the entire interviewed sample and 54% of the weekday interviewees owned computer/video games.

Sixty-four percent of the entire weekday interviewed sample used their computer/video games on the previous day, and 66% and 62% of the London and New York samples, respectively, used their games on the previous weekday.

Children were also asked to recall how long they played with their video games. Among the entire weekday interviewees owning games, 16% played them for 1 hour or less, 7% between 1-2 hours and 1% for more than 2 hours. Although forty percent played games, they could not remember how long they played and 36% did not play games at all. The mean playing time of the 19 children able to recall how long they played was 83 minutes.

The New York-London interview figures were remarkably similar: Seventeen percent of the New York students and 14% of the London students played games for 1 hour or less; 4% and 11%, respectively, played between 1-2 hours; 0% and 2%, respectively, played for more than 2 hours; 41% and 39%, respectively, played games but could not remember how long they played; and 38% and 34%, respectively, did not use their games on the previous day. The London mean time for usage was 92 minutes as compared with 71 minutes in New York; however, these means are based on very low Ns and might not be especially reliable.

These figures suggest that nine-to-eleven year old children have very similar attention spans and behavior patterns with respect to video game playing. As we saw with television viewing in Chapter 4, we may theorize that the structure of video game playing places rather predictable constraints on the amount of time a child cares to or is mentally able to devote to this activity;

that is, at any particular stage of a child's social and psychological development, the child has a finite tolerance for video game playing and when this threshold is reached, the child will voluntarily stop playing games. Within the population of nine-to-eleven year old children, we might see predictable percentages who do not enjoy playing with video games, predictable percentages who play for varied amounts of time, and other percentages who play but cannot recall how long they play.

While fairly high percentages of game owners played their games on the previous day, it was quite clear from the responses of the children who did not play their games that this activity was fast losing favor with both London and New York children. This apparent antipathy towards video games was mirrored by an article in The New York Times of September 29, 1986 which shows how quickly video games lost favor with children. In 1982, the peak year for video game and cartridge sales, approximately 8.5 million video games and 62 million cartridges were sold in the U.S. By the time of this survey at the end of 1984, less than 2 million video games and 22 million cartridges were sold. These low sales figures appear to be strong indicators of how children felt about video games; children were excited with their newly acquired games but the games lost their appeal (and their ability to gratify needs) within a rather short period of time.

The interview figures are compatible with those in The Times article by showing that most children still were using their games on a fairly regular basis, although a sizable minority of children were becoming bored with

their "toys." Many children who responded on the questionnaire that they hardly ever use their video games, later indicated in the interviews why they didn't use their games more frequently. Most non-players said that they had simply lost interest in their games. One New Yorker said, "I'm using them (the games) less now than before because I was excited about them when I first got them." One London girl similarly stated, "I got the Atari for Christmas and played it a lot for a few weeks and then forgot about it." Another New York girl responded that "I don't have good cartridges and I get bored. I played with it more when I first got it." For many children, video games were no different from other types of children's games - when the excitement and novelty wore off soon after the games were purchased, they also stopped gratifying related entertainment needs.

Interestingly, quite a few children weren't able to use their games more frequently because the games had to be plugged into the family television, thereby preventing other family members from viewing television programs. A New York boy said, "It is hooked-up to the TV and my parents watch TV all the time so I can't use it." For these children, parents' actions prevented them from pursuing this activity.

Still other children admitted that they had difficulty hooking the games to the television. Presumably, they would have played games more frequently if they had had a separate monitor with a permanent hook-up to the games.

The popularity of these games attests to their

ability to gratify very real needs in children, particularly their fantasy needs. Cartoon viewing and video game playing appear to gratify similar needs in children but differ in the way those needs become gratified. Video games require interaction between user(s) and hardware, while TV viewing does not. We can conclude that children become much more actively involved with their video game monitor than with their TV screen.

Gender and Video Game Playing

Environmental factors associated with city of residence did not appear to be associated with game playing, since the London-New York playing figures were so similar. Gender, however, is strongly related to ownership of computers and video/computer games and computer/video game use.

Families comprised of only male children and only female children were identified. Sixty-eight percent of the interviewed "boys-only" families had computer/video games as compared to only 42% of the "girls-only" families. Likewise, 34% of the interviewed "boys-only" families had computers as compared with only 24% for the interviewed "girls-only" families. These figures suggest that girls are much less likely to own computers and video games than are boys.

Since parents were not interviewed, we can only speculate about why girls are so much less likely to own computers and related software than are boys. One possibility is that girls are not as interested in computers and computer/video games as are boys and,

therefore, are less likely to ask their parents to buy these items. The other possibility is that parents tend to feel that computer equipment is less appropriate for girls than for boys and so are less apt to purchase these items for girls. Both possibilities suggest that video games and computers have become genderized toys, much like dolls and baseballs. Girls either consciously or unconsciously reject these "masculine" items because they are "for boys" and/or parents do not consider purchasing these items for girls because they are "too masculine" for girls. In either case, gender-based stereotypical views seem to influence whether girls develop positive or negative attitudes towards home computers and computer/video games and whether their parents decide to purchase these items for them.

Gender is also associated with computer/video game use. Table 6.1 shows how often children indicated on the questionnaire that they usually play with their video games on Saturdays (the day of highest game usage) by the respondents' sex.

TABLE 6.1: AMOUNT OF TIME CHILDREN PLAY VIDEO GAMES ON SATURDAYS BY SEX

(ENTIRE SAMPLE-QUESTIONNAIRE)

<u>SEX</u>	<u>MALE</u>	<u>FEMALE</u>
<u>GAME PLAYING</u>		
LESS THAN 1 HOUR	26%	49%
1-2 HOURS	29	23
MORE THAN 2 HOURS	45	30
	<u>100%</u>	<u>100%</u>
N=	(133)	(111)

GAMMA = .234

The figures in Table 6.1 show that significantly higher percentages of males claimed to play with video/computer games on Saturdays than did females. Fifteen percent more males played for more than 2 hours than did females, while nearly twice as many females than males played games for less than 1 hour. The same table for weekday playing showed less significant figures, but still showed that somewhat more males than females (9%) played for more than 2 hours while 7% more females played for less than 1 hour. Comparing boys' and girls' Saturday playing times with corresponding weekday playing times, the percentages of boys and girls who claimed to play with their games for more than two hours was nearly three times greater on Saturdays as they were on weekdays, suggesting that increased amounts of free time on Saturdays as opposed to weekdays allowed all children the opportunity to play video games for longer periods of time.

The follow-up interviews acted as a cross-validation of this question by asking boys and girls how much time they played with their video/computer games during the preceding weekday. This information, presented in Table 6.2, confirms the results shown in Table 6.1; males were again much more likely to play games than females and males played games for longer periods of time than females.

TABLE 6.2: AMOUNT OF TIME CHILDREN PLAY VIDEO GAMES ON WEEKDAYS BY SEX (ENTIRE SAMPLE-INTERVIEW)

<u>SEX</u>	<u>MALE</u>	<u>FEMALE</u>
<u>GAME PLAYING</u>		
NO USE	48%	74%
LESS THAN 1 HOUR	33	20
1-2 HOURS	18	6
MORE THAN 2 HOURS	3	0
	100%	100%
	(40)	(35)
GAMMA = -.508	N=	

Very similar results were obtained in both cities, except that 29% of the London males played video games for more than 1 hour, whereas for the New York sample, only 11% of the males did. In terms of the New York and London comparisons, it is possible that because New York students had so much more homework than London students, the New Yorkers had less time to play with their games.

Clearly, relatively fewer video game owners played video games on weekdays than on Saturdays and when children did play games, they tended to play for a fairly short period of time. Girls in this sample played much less often and for much shorter durations than boys.

We do not know why girls play games so much less frequently than boys although ownership figures for "boys-only" and "girls-only" families suggested that gender-based societal views could explain why girls might develop negative attitudes towards computer/video game playing. However, Patricia Greenfield (1984) cites Malone's study (1981), "Toward a Theory of Intrinsically Motivating Instruction" as an alternative hypothesis. According to this theory, most video games are more gratifying for boys

than for girls since they deal with aggressive and violent fantasy which Greenfield feels are "turn-ons for boys but turn-offs for girls." As seen in Chapter 4, this theoretical approach could directly explain why New York girls were less likely to watch television cartoons than boys. Here we see somewhat less direct, but nonetheless strong, evidence of the applicability of this theory towards video game playing.

Thirty-three percent of the females as opposed to only 11% of the males said that they did not play with their games more often because they were "too busy with other activities". This type of remark could suggest that girls were three times as likely to participate in activities other than video game playing as were boys. Video games did not, therefore, seem to gratify the needs of girls as much as they apparently did for boys. Possibly, the girls' apparent disinterest in video games could be explained, as we saw with cartoon viewing and Greenfield's analyses, by the rather violent, aggressive themes endemic to cartoons and many video games.

Greenfield sees potential academic and economic problems arising for females because of their apparent antipathy towards computer games. She believes, "Games (appear) to be the entry point into the world of computers for most children. If children's interest in computers begins with games, then the fact that the most common computer games involve aggressive and violent fantasy themes may have the effect of turning many girls away from computers in general. This would be especially unfortunate in a field that is still in rapid growth and

therefore should be especially promising for women" (Greenfield, 1984:94-95).

Video Game Usage and Academic Achievement

Computer games and other software have been in homes for only a few years, so it is too early to assess whether they have had any positive effects on academic or economic achievement. In this study, there was a weak, but negative association between reading level and children's self-reported game usage during the week prior to the questionnaire administration; that is, high reading level appeared to be associated with low levels of video game usage. In fact, 58% of the children who indicated that they hardly ever played their video games during the week before the questionnaire administration were above average readers but only 37% of the children who said that they almost always played their games during the preceding week were above average readers. While the measure of association between video game usage and reading level was not very high ($\Gamma = .17$ with Chi Square significant at the .01 level), this finding does indicate that there was at least a negative association between these two variables.

We should be very sensitive to the fact that while high levels of video game usage might be acting as an initial, negative influence on children's reading grades, high levels of interest in video games might, nonetheless, turn out to be a significant factor which could be positively associated with other cognitive and non-cognitive academic skills besides reading ability. High

computer game interest might also have a significant influence on future access to employment in the computer industry, not to mention other areas of the economy, as Greenfield suspects.

Summary

The data in this chapter and Chapter 4 indicate that on any given weekday, only 30% of the VCR owners but 64% of the computer/video game owners, actually used these video items. While most of the computer/video game owners appeared to regularly play with these items, most children did not play with their games for very long periods of time. Video games appear to be rather transient gratifiers of children's needs, as compared to television viewing.

In a sense, then, parents and educators should not be overly concerned about the amount of time children are devoting to video usage. Nonetheless, these items have not been in children's homes for a very long time. Longitudinal studies should be started now, to discover whether long term exposure to these items will have significant effects on children's cognitive and social development and future economic status.

We also saw a strong relationship between gender and computer ownership and computer/video game ownership and usage. Boys were much more likely to own and play video games than were girls and boys were much more likely to play with these games for longer periods of time than were girls. Girls' antipathy towards the violence-oriented video games may explain girls' relative lack of enthusiasm for game playing. Looking at this assumption in a

different way, we might conclude that given the way boys are socialized, boys might have a greater need to act out their aggressive feelings than do girls, and therefore, might also find video games to be more gratifying. Both views support the conclusion that computers and computer/video games have become "genderized" items which are targeted to boys rather than to girls.

CHAPTER 7

CHILDREN'S NON-VIDEO LEISURE TIME ACTIVITIES

One contention of this study is that environmental, social and economic factors influence the menu of activities available to children and the activity choices they ultimately make. In many cases, these factors reflect needs and interests of adults and other agents of control which supercede the needs and interests of the child.

Therefore, we now examine how the following variables might influence children's choices of various non-video activities:

- . Ecological features in the child's community
- . Educational policy regarding homework
- . The child's gender
- . The parent's occupational status
- . The child's ethnicity and race

In addition, as done in Chapter 4, we will test the displacement theory of television with regard to non-video activities; that is, we will try to assess whether children who participated in specific non-video activities (such as homework, reading or playing outdoors) tended to spend less time watching television than did children who refrained from doing these activities.

Children's Weekday Discretionary and Non-discretionary Time

The New York school day finishes at 3:00, while the London school day ends at 4:00. Since the weekday median bedtimes for New York and London children were 9:15 and

9:00, respectively, New York and London children had-from the time they were dismissed from school to the time they went to bed-approximately six and five hours, respectively, available for many kinds of video and non-video activities.

As noted in Chapter 3, children in both cities watched almost identical amounts of television and video cassette programs: 2 hours and 22 minutes in New York as opposed to 2 hours and 8 minutes in London. Approximately 45% of children's discretionary, after-school time was spent watching television.

The only other significant video activity was video and computer game playing. The data in Chapter 5 showed that 57% of the entire sample owned video games and approximately 65% of these children used their games on an average weekday, with most appearing to use these games for much less than one hour each day.

Video activities, therefore, consumed about half of the children's available weekday free-time. We will now ascertain how children allocate the remainder of their after-school time to other, non-video activities.

It is assumed that most children spent approximately 30 minutes eating dinner and 30 minutes preparing for bed. We will see in this chapter that most New York students did approximately one hour of homework each weekday, while London children did very little or none. The balance of the children's day was devoted to various kinds of non-video activities, such as outdoor and indoor playing, reading, and listening to music.

Common After-School Activities of Children

On the questionnaire, all children were asked to indicate how frequently they read for pleasure at home, played games at home, met friends away from their homes, talked to family members, or listened to music during the preceding week. In addition, the interviewed children were asked to describe all their activities during the preceding day, rather than the preceding week, thereby enabling the interviewer to supplement and cross-validate the children's questionnaire responses and to analyze this information in more detail than the questionnaire format alone, would have permitted.

The interview responses were coded into one of seven categories: schoolwork, playing with friends outdoors, playing with friends indoors, playing games alone, reading for pleasure, and listening to music. Activities such as doing household chores, shopping, visiting relatives, were included in the residual category, "other activities".

For purposes of comparison, Appendix 10 shows how often children estimated on the questionnaire that they had engaged in various non-video activities during the preceding week. The more precise figures in Table 7.1 describe the kinds of non-video activities children reported to the interviewer that they engaged in during the previous weekday. It should be noted that Table 7.1 is based only on children who were interviewed on Tuesdays through Fridays, thereby limiting this particular analysis to weekday activities.(1)

TABLE 7.1: THE PERCENTAGE OF CHILDREN WHO ENGAGED IN
VARIOUS NON-VIDEO RELATED ACTIVITIES DURING THE
DAY PRIOR TO THEIR INTERVIEW.
(WEEKDAY INTERVIEWEES ONLY)

	<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>NEW YORK</u>	<u>LONDON</u>
<u>ACTIVITY</u>			
DID SCHOOLWORK	53%	91%(105)	21%(123)
PLAYED WITH FRIENDS OUTDOORS	29	20(104)	37(123)
PLAYED WITH FRIENDS INDOORS	29	28(104)	30(123)
PLAYED GAMES ALONE	17	18(104)	15(123)
READ FOR PLEASURE	15	11(104)	19(123)
LISTENED TO MUSIC	6	5(104)	7(123)
OTHER ACTIVITIES	70	72(104)	68(123)

Homework and Playing Outdoors

Strictly speaking, homework should not be considered a leisure-time activity since most children do not willingly choose to do homework. Rather, teachers and parents tend to coerce children into doing this activity. As such, we might conclude that parents and teachers, as agents of social control, use homework as a method to control children's academic behavior as well as their after-school activity choices (since homework can reduce the amount of time available to other, non-academic activities). Nevertheless, since Table 7.1 shows that of all the listed non-video activities, (excluding the "other activity" category), the homework category had the highest percentage of student participation, we must consider this activity in relation to the other, more voluntary activities.

Table 7.1 shows that 53% of all children in the

sample did homework on the previous day, but when we examine the respective percentages for London and New York, we see that there is a 70 percentage point difference between these 2 sub-samples. (It should be noted that 57% of the London children who did homework attended the upper middle-class, Freetown's School.)

The New York-London homework differences can be explained by the respective set of attitudes towards homework held by London and New York teachers. New York teachers were recently directed by the N.Y.C. Board of Education to give approximately 45 minutes of daily homework. The mean number of minutes devoted to homework among the New York interviewed sample was approximately 60 minutes.

London elementary school teachers do not regularly give homework to children because, as one teacher replied, "Homework discourages many children from playing outside after school." We will see that there might be some validity to these beliefs.

During the interview, children were asked whether they did homework during the previous night, and if so, how long they were engaged in this task. Table 7.2 shows the relation of playing outdoors with friends to doing homework for the New York and London children.

TABLE 7.2: THE RELATIONSHIP OF DOING HOMEWORK AND PLAYING OUTDOORS WITH FRIENDS (WEEKDAY INTERVIEWEES)

	NEW YORK		LONDON		ENTIRE SAMPLE	
<u>HOMEWORK DOERS</u>	<u>WORKER</u>	<u>NON-WORKER</u>	<u>WORKER</u>	<u>NON-WORKER</u>	<u>WORKER</u>	<u>NON-WORKER</u>
PLAYED OUTDOORS	20%	20%	12%	43%	18%	41%
N =	(94)	(10)	(26)	(97)	(120)	(107)
GAMMA =	.007		-.708		-.514	

Of the entire weekday sample, 18% of the children who did homework also played outdoors, but 41% of the children who did not have (do) homework played outdoors. These figures permit us to infer that a statistically significant, negative relationship exists between doing homework and playing outdoors.

However, when we considered the city of residence, we see that doing homework seemed to have very different effects on outdoor playing behavior of London and New York children. In New York, children who did homework were just as likely to go outside to play as were children who did not do homework. Twenty percent of both the homework doers and non-doers played outside, suggesting that very little, if any, relationship exists between these two variables.(2)

In London, however, 43% of the children who did not do homework did play outside with friends, as opposed to only 12% of the children who did homework, suggesting that, contrary to the corresponding New York figures, London children's playtime is significantly reduced when homework is assigned.(3) Qualitative information obtained

from interview responses will shed more light on why homework has such different effects on London and New York children's playtime habits.

Since New York children received regularly scheduled, daily homework assignments, we can assume that they also developed fairly rigid routines for doing homework. These routines perhaps enabled many children to effectively plan other activities, such as playtime, around their homework. When New York children got homework, therefore, they still apparently managed to incorporate at least some playtime into their daily lives.

London children, on the other hand, were apparently not accustomed to getting daily homework assignments. For Londoners, homework might be described as an unscheduled and unplanned activity rather than as a predictable, routinized daily event. Homework, on those fairly rare occasions when it was assigned, might have had a more disruptive influence on London children's overall leisure time in general, and outdoor playtime in particular, than for New York children, since London children probably did not have enough opportunity to learn how to incorporate homework into their daily routines as did New York children.

The speech patterns and the syntax of most children indicated that they did have fairly routine uses of time when they came home from school. These interview responses also showed how New York and London students integrated school work and playtime activities. Most New York children responded to the question about their after school routines with the statement, "I came home, did my

homework, watched television." In contrast, the London children generally responded, "I came home, went outside with my mates, watched some telly, ate dinner."

The New York children clearly were instructed to complete their chores (in this case, homework) before they could watch television or go outside to play. For London children, homework was an exceptional chore which had not become a regular fixture in their lives and had not become a part of their after-school routines. When homework was given to London children, regular play time patterns might very well have been disrupted and/or eliminated.

It would be logical to assume that there would also be a similarly strong, negative relationship between the amount of time children spent doing their homework and whether they went outside to play. The findings in New York suggest, in fact, that a curvilinear relationship exists between these two variables (Pearson's $r = .032$, not significant at the .05 level). That is, children who spent the least and most amount of time doing homework were least likely to play outside. Those children who did moderate amounts of homework were most likely to play outdoors.

The New York outdoor playtime figures showed that 13% of the children who did 30 minutes or less of homework played outside the previous day, while 22% of those who did between 30 minutes and 1 hour of homework, 25% of those who did between 1 hour and 90 minutes of homework and 10% of those who did 90 minutes or more of homework went outside to play.

One possible explanation for these rather unexpected

figures is that generally, while large percentages of children who did large amounts of homework did go outside to play, they might not have spent as much time playing outdoors as the children who had less homework.

Unfortunately, many children could not recall the amount of time spent playing outdoors, so we could not test the validity of this explanation.

Play and Peer Relationships

Segal and Segal (1986:14-17) suggest that "the child's destiny will be determined in part by the power of peers." They state that peer groups help children "find out how to deal with aggression, learn about sex, develop moral standards from within and find emotional security." They conclude that "experience with peers is not a superficial luxury to be enjoyed by some children and not by others but a necessity in childhood socialization."

Meeting and playing with peers outdoors and indoors were the two most popular non-video discretionary activities among those summarized in Table 7.1. Since these types of activities are considered to be important influences on children's physical and social development (Segal and Segal, 1986), we wondered why some children engaged in these activities while others did not.

The figures in Table 7.1 show that 29% of the entire sample played with friends outdoors during the previous weekday, however, the difference between the proportion of London and New York students who played outside with peers was 19 percentage points (41% of the London interviewees as opposed to 22% of the New Yorkers played outside with

peers). The questionnaire figures in Appendix 10 tend to validate these percentage differences since we also see in this table that 32% of the London sample but only 21% of the New-York sample said that they almost always met friends away from their homes during the preceding week.

These differences could be attributed to each city's respective weather conditions, number of daylight hours after school, amounts of homework assigned, and/or ecological characteristics associated with each neighborhood. We will see that a preponderance of evidence exists which show that ecological factors and homework account for most, if not all, of these differences.

Meteorological Conditions and Playtime

The London children were interviewed in mid-September; the New York children were interviewed in early December. The different seasons would naturally lead us to suspect that different weather and meteorological conditions accounted for some differences in the children's outdoor playtime activities. However, the weather in London in mid-September was rather similar to the weather in New York City in early December. In both cities, the weather was fairly dry, and the daily high temperatures were in the upper 40's-lower 50's during the two week interview periods. If children wanted to play outdoors, the weather in both cities would not have been an impediment.

Likewise, sunset in London from the end of September to the first week in October was approximately 6:45 p.m.

Sunset in New York from the end of November through the first week in December was approximately 5:45 p.m. Since the London children were dismissed from school at 4:00 and the New York children were dismissed at 3:00, both groups had about the same 2 hours 45 minutes of daylight available for playing outdoors. Clearly, weather conditions and amount of daylight hours would not explain why nearly twice as many London children played outdoors with friends than did New York children.

Neighborhood Characteristics and Children's Outdoor Playtime

Since weather and meteorological conditions were substantially the same for both New York and London children, they can be eliminated as possible contributing factors to the playtime differences. Therefore, we can turn to examine ecological differences in the characteristics of the neighborhoods in the two samples as possible explanations for the different amounts of outdoor playtime. The London neighborhoods appear to be safer places for children to play than New York neighborhoods.

Few of the London children lived in high-rise apartment buildings. Nearly all of the neighborhoods (with the exception of The City) consisted of three storey row houses with four to five apartments. Neighborhoods surrounding all the London schools in the sample appeared to be fairly safe, judging by teacher and resident comments and official London crime figures.

Not once in the interviews did a London child say that his/her outdoor play activities were affected by considerations of safety. Some children said they met

friends outdoors indicating that they went to local parks to play. Most children, however, stayed on their blocks and did not wander far from their home.

Most outdoor activities for the London children were child-centered, spontaneous and exploratory in nature and, consequently, reflected this sense of well-being. The boys typically walked along the store-lined streets, bought some sweets, or rode bicycles-all in the company of their friends. A few boys said that they went alone to local parks some distance from their homes to collect seasonal berries, called conkers. When asked how their parents felt about their going to play in fairly isolated, wooded areas, they seemed surprised and, after a few seconds, answered that their parents didn't care.

London girls generally stayed closer to home engaging in fairly sedentary activities with their friends. Typical outdoor activities for them were playing with dolls in the backyard or in the local park, or simply talking with other female friends in front of the house. Groups of girls visited local sweet shops, as well.

The issue of safety did not appear to play an important factor in whether London children played outside with friends; these children lived in relatively safe, relatively well trafficked neighborhoods. In addition, the low-rise houses which abutted the sidewalks afforded children a high degree of visual contact with their families and neighbors. A fairly substantial number of children took advantage of these ecological features and played outside with their friends.

The New York neighborhoods differed from those in

London, and these differences seem to explain how and why fewer New York children played outdoors with friends.

Approximately 85% of the New York sample lived in a densely-populated complex of high-rise apartment buildings. The vast majority of the children living here said that they were not permitted to play outdoors alone because their parents felt that the environment was not safe.

In fact, this housing project has a relatively low crime rate, compared to the crime rates of the city as a whole. In addition, a large contingent of security guards roam the extensive grounds and buildings. Yet, the perception of many residents, including the children, was that the grounds were not particularly safe. Perhaps part of the reason for this false impression is that on any given day, few people usually socialize on the grounds of this building complex. Lack of benches and sitting areas and fairly distant, centralized shopping facilities may account for the light pedestrian traffic in front of each building. The combination of densely populated, high-rise apartments and under-utilized walkways could create a false impression of danger to parents and children and this misperception may have discouraged many parents from allowing their children to play outdoors alone.

The other 15% of the New York sample lived in Manhasset, Long Island, a suburban neighborhood of single family homes with lawns, trees and hedges insulating the homes from the street. For children living here, outdoor play would entail traveling some distance from their homes. In fact, of the children in Manhasset who did meet

with friends, meetings usually occurred several miles away from their homes. In most cases, parents drove their children to these activities.

The New York children in this sample probably had some difficulty meeting with classmates after school since many of the children lived some distance from each other. Spontaneous meetings between friends, as they seemed to frequently occur in London, happened very infrequently in New York. Rather, New York children tended to meet other children away from their houses, under the auspices of institutionalized, adult-organized activities, such as Little League, Boy Scouts or after-school centers.

While this study was not able to catalogue salient features of children's interactions occurring within adult-centered and peer-centered groups, there is little doubt that qualitatively different forms of interpersonal relations do occur within each type of social setting. It could also be reasonable to assume that each type of social setting gratifies its own specific set of needs and fulfills its own characteristically different social and psychological functions for children.

London children appeared to have access to both adult-centered (such as after-school programs) and peer-centered playtime activities. They appeared to overwhelmingly prefer the peer-centered activities. New York children, on the other hand, seemed to have little choice but to engage in predominantly adult-centered playtime activities. Presumably, they would participate in more peer-centered activities if environmental conditions were different. Further research might

discover if limited access to peer-centered social activities adversely affects New York children's social and psychological development.

Outdoor Play and Gender and Ethnicity

If playing outdoors with friends is indeed beneficial to the social and physical development of children, and if various environmental factors are associated with the frequency with which children engage in outdoor playing, then we should be very concerned if particular sub-groups are especially sensitive to these environmental factors, and consequently do not play outdoors as often as members of other groups.

We hypothesized that because many females, Hispanics and Blacks appear to be particularly sensitive to environmental factors due to sexual, cultural and social constraints imposed on these groups, they would also not play outdoors with friends as often as males, and other ethnic and racial groups.

Because each city has such different environmental characteristics, play behavior was analyzed separately for London and New York. Table 7.3 shows the relationship of sex to outdoor play by city of residence. Table 7.4 shows the relationship of ethnicity and race to outdoor play by city of residence.

TABLE 7.3: THE RELATIONSHIP OF SEX TO OUTDOOR PLAY BY CITY OF RESIDENCE (WEEKDAY INTERVIEWEES)

<u>CITY</u>	<u>NEW YORK</u>		<u>LONDON</u>		<u>ENTIRE SAMPLE</u>	
<u>SEX</u>	<u>MALES</u>	<u>FEMALES</u>	<u>MALES</u>	<u>FEMALES</u>	<u>MALES</u>	<u>FEMALES</u>
<u>PLAYED OUTDOORS</u>	31%	11%	39%	34%	36%	23%
<u>N =</u>	(48)	(56)	(61)	(62)	(109)	(118)
<u>GAMMA =</u>	.582		.118		.305	

Table 7.3 shows that in London, boys were just as likely as girls to play outdoors. In New York, however, boys were nearly three times more likely to play outdoors than were girls.

TABLE 7.4: THE RELATIONSHIP OF ETHNICITY/RACE TO OUTDOOR PLAY BY CITY OF RESIDENCE (WEEKDAY INTERVIEWEES)

<u>CITY</u>	<u>NEW YORK</u>				<u>LONDON</u>				<u>ENTIRE SAMPLE</u>			
<u>ETHNICITY (a)</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>
<u>PLAYED OUTDOORS</u>	27%	13%	17%	15%	40%	0%	N/A	37%	35%	9%	17%	29%
<u>N =</u>	(44)	(16)	(18)	(26)	(70)	(6)		(47)	(114)	(22)	(19)	(72)
<u>CRAMER'S V =</u>	.154				.189				.186			

(a) 1=White English speakers 3=Hispanic
 2=Black English speakers 4=Other Non-English speakers

In London, contrary to the stated hypothesis, we found that the White and Other ethnic groups played outdoors with equal frequency (40% and 37%, respectively). In New York, however, White, English speakers were more likely to play outdoors than were members of most other ethnic groups, thus confirming the hypothesis. In both cities, Black children played outdoors less often than did children in all other ethnic groups.

The figures in Tables 7.3 and 7.4 indicate that in

London, gender and cultural characteristics did not seem to affect children's outdoor playtime; that is to say, since each neighborhood in the London sample appeared to be a relatively safe environment for children, boys and girls and children in most ethnic groups were equally likely to play outdoors.

The New York sample presented a rather different picture of children's outdoor activities with respect to gender and race/ethnicity. The issue of street safety could serve as at least a partial explanation for why much larger percentages of New York boys went outside to play as compared with girls, especially since many more New York girls than boys mentioned safety considerations as reasons for their lack of interest in playing outdoors.

Among the New York White, English speakers, 27% played outdoors as compared with 17% of the Hispanics, 15% of the Other-White ethnics and 13% of the Blacks. While the differences between ethnic groups were not extremely large, we do see that the New York children who were most likely to live in the safest neighborhoods (White, English speakers) were also most likely to play outside.

It is also interesting that in both London and New York, smaller percentages of Black children played outdoors with friends than did all other ethnic groups. One possible explanation for these differences could be that since a larger percentage of Blacks tended to live in higher crime areas than did Whites, they would also avoid going outside to play because of safety factors. However, we must keep in mind that very few children in either city lived in neighborhoods with particularly high crime rates.

An alternate explanation for these differences could be derived from the fact that children tend to socialize with other children of their own ethnic/racial groups. Since there were so few Blacks in each sample, Black children probably had less opportunity to socialize with other Blacks and possibly were not as fully integrated into the existing White peer social groups, as were children in the other ethnic groups. We will also see in Table 7.5 that of all the ethnic groups, Blacks were less likely to play with friends indoors, thus providing additional validation for this social isolation theory. (See Chapter 4 for a discussion of peer groups based on ethnic/racial affiliation).

We therefore have seen that when parent concerns for the safety of their children, educational policy regarding homework, and the ecological relationship between the street and the home fostered children's outdoor playing, as it seemed to do in London, children responded by playing outdoors with friends. When these factors discouraged children from playing outdoors, as they seemed to do in New York, children tended to stay indoors, relatively isolated from their peers.

The data in this survey, unfortunately, do not allow us to isolate any one of these factors from the others. As a result, we cannot state the relative importance of homework, neighborhood safety, environmental-ecological factors or some other unexplained factor(s) on whether or not children chose to go outside to play with friends, although the data seem to suggest that homework and neighborhood characteristics do exert important effects on

this activity.

The Relationship Between Race and Ethnicity and Indoor Non-Video Activities

On any given weekday, nearly equal percentages of children in both cities engaged in indoor non-video related activities, such as, reading, playing with friends indoors, listening to music, watching television, and talking to family members. (See Appendix 10 and Table 7.1.)

However, when we examine the relationship between these activities and race and ethnicity in Table 7.5, we see that in both New York and London, Blacks were less likely to play with friends inside their houses than were children in all other ethnic groups.

TABLE 7.5: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ENGAGING IN INDOOR
NON-VIDEO ACTIVITIES AND RACE/ETHNICITY
(WEEKDAY INTERVIEWEES)

<u>CITY</u>	<u>NEW YORK</u>				<u>LONDON</u>				<u>ENTIRE SAMPLE</u>			
<u>ETHNICITY (a)</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>
PLAYED WITH FRIENDS INDOORS	23%	19%	44%	31%	34%	0%	N/A	28%	30%	14%	44%	29%
CRAMER'S V =			.191				.173				.135	
PLAYED ALONE INDOORS	23	19	28	4	16	0	N/A	17	18	14	28	13
CRAMER'S V =			.226				.107				.106	
READ FOR PLEASURE	14	6	17	4	23	0	N/A	15	19	5	17	11
CRAMER'S V =			.161				.150				.139	
LISTEN TO MUSIC	7	6	0	4	10	0	N/A	2	9	5	0	3
CRAMER'S V =			.117				.164				.138	
N =	(44)	(16)	(18)	(26)	(70)	(6)	N/A	(47)	(114)	(22)	(18)	(26)
(a) 1=White English speakers					3=Hispanic							
2=Black English speakers					4=Other Non-English speaker							

The figures in Table 7.4 have shown that Blacks were less likely to play outdoors with friends than were children in all other ethnic groups. The figures in Table 7.5 show that, in addition, Blacks were less likely to play indoors with friends than were children in the other ethnic groups. These findings support the previously cited social isolation theory as it applied to Blacks, although the data do not show whether Whites and Hispanics are rejecting Blacks or whether Blacks are rejecting Whites and Hispanics.

While there was only a four percentage point difference between New York White-English speakers and Blacks, there was a 25 percentage point difference between Hispanics and Blacks and a 12 percentage point difference between Other Non-English-speakers and Blacks. In London, none of the Blacks played indoors with friends. The fact that Hispanics and Other Non-English speakers were more likely to socialize with others suggest that these children also experienced higher levels of acceptance from their peers than did Blacks.

Video Arcades: Peer-Centered Social Institutions

Video arcades captured the enthusiasm of teen and pre-teenage children several years ago. Within a very short time, arcades began appearing in suburban shopping malls, and soon thereafter, in stores located in local shopping areas. While this survey did not find that arcade playing was a particularly important leisure-time activity for children, a more careful look at this activity sheds light on how and why children generally opt

for particular leisure time pursuits.

When this study was conducted, the video fad had already peaked and was beginning to wind down. Even so, 55% of the entire sample went to an arcade more than once in the preceding month, 22% had been to an arcade only once in the preceding month and 22% had never been to a video arcade.

In both New York and London, 55% of the children had been to an arcade more than once during the preceding month, while 27% of the New York sample said that they had been to an arcade only once within the preceding month and 17% of the New York sample said that they had never been to an arcade. For the London sample, 28% said that they had never been to an arcade while 18% said that they had been to an arcade only once during the past month. Therefore, we see that 11 percent more Londoners than New Yorkers had never been to an arcade.

New York students often cited safety concerns as reasons for not going to arcades more often. The problem of arcade safety has been studied by Ellis (1984) who found that 14% of Canadian students reported that in video arcades, they had been asked to buy drugs and almost 20% said that others had tried to persuade them to do "something their parents wouldn't want them to do." However, most of the latter children had been at an arcade after 10:00 p.m. when they experienced these episodes.

During the interviews, New York and London children were asked why they do not go to arcades more often. For the New York students, a major concern was safety; that is, arcades were perceived to be fairly dangerous places.

One New York boy replied, "Last year I went once. I thought it was a bad place. People were smoking." Another child said, "Mom doesn't want me to go because there are bad kids hanging around it." Still another boy said that his mother was afraid he would get kidnapped. And a girl was afraid that other kids would "ask me for money." In contrast, not one London child cited a lack of safety as a reason for not going to video arcades.

For London children, the relatively few arcades near their homes and the expense of arcade games seemed to be much more important reasons for not going to video arcades than the issue of safety. In fact, most London children said that they mainly go to arcades when they are on summer holidays. Since the London interviews were conducted in early September, a great many of the children who said they went to arcades within the past month, did so because they were on a holiday with their parents; that is, they did not frequent a neighborhood arcade. In addition, two classes had just come back from a week journey north of London. Many of the children in these classes said that they had gone to an arcade only because they were on this trip. Quite likely, if the London interviews had been held in November, as they were in New York, much smaller percentages of London children would have reported recent visits to video arcades.

Other children in London and New York indicated that they didn't go to arcades more often because they had video games at home and therefore "shouldn't waste money playing these same games." Many of these children said that their parents purposely bought them home video games

so that they would not want to spend so much money at arcades.

These varied responses show how difficult it is to generalize about how and why children participate in any particular leisure time activity. While children's leisure-time choices are, therefore, certainly constrained by their parent's actions, children also appear to internalize their parents' attitudes and fears. We don't, as yet, know if children or parents are concerned about the expense of arcade playing. And we don't know if children who say they are afraid to go to arcades, are responding to their own knowledge of arcade violence, or are echoing parents' statements which might or might not be true.

This researcher conducted a few in-depth interviews with children who go to arcades often. The responses demonstrate that children apparently were attracted to video arcades for the gratification provided by the video games as well as the gratification provided by their peer groups.

One girl living in Brooklyn said that while she had five home video games, she preferred to play games at arcades because "The home games are boring over here." When asked why the same video games were boring at home but exciting at the arcade, she quickly said, "There are more people at arcades than at home."

Maybe, some New York children found arcades exciting places because they were one of the very few places which afforded children the chance to socialize with friends without adult supervision. Yet, one wonders whether much

socializing occurs at the video arcades since several children said that when "someone plays, usually two other people are watching. Playing games are more important than being with friends."

This researcher observed video game playing behavior in an arcade located at the Roosevelt Field mall in Long Island, New York and in a small bodega in East New York, Brooklyn. Children did, in fact, crowd around the video machine, eagerly watching the action on the screen. Little conversation took place, except for comments about video game maneuvers. For at least the nine-to-eleven year olds, little verbal interaction seems to occur in video arcades. The element of excitement generated by the presence of other children as well as the excitement of the games themselves, provided a substantial incentive for children to frequent video arcades, in spite of their expense and perceived dangers.

Non-Video Activities and Television Displacement

Many parents and educators contend that by providing children with alternate, non-video activities, children will decrease their television viewing time. The data do not seem to confirm this contention. Table 7.6 shows the relationship between participating in various non-video activities and watching TV.

TABLE 7.6: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PARTICIPATION IN
NON-VIDEO ACTIVITIES AND TOTAL TV AND VCR
VIEWING (WEEKDAY INTERVIEWEES ONLY)

<u>ACTIVITY</u>	<u>ENTIRE SAMPLE</u>									
	<u>HOME</u>		<u>PLAYED</u>		<u>PLAYED</u>		<u>PLAYED</u>		<u>READ</u>	
	<u>WORK</u>		<u>OUTDOORS</u>		<u>INDOORS</u>		<u>ALONE</u>		<u>LISTENED</u>	
	<u>YES</u>	<u>NO</u>	<u>YES</u>	<u>NO</u>	<u>YES</u>	<u>NO</u>	<u>YES</u>	<u>NO</u>	<u>YES</u>	<u>NO</u>
<u>VIEWING</u>										
<u>LEVEL</u>										
<u>(HOURS)</u>										
0-1	33%	35%	35%	34%	42%	30%	26%	36%	59%	30%
1-2	35	32	26	36	26	36	29	34	24	35
2-3	11	15	14	13	11	14	16	12	3	15
3+	22	18	26	18	21	20	29	18	15	21
N=	<u>100%100%</u>		<u>100%100%</u>		<u>100%100%</u>		<u>100%100%</u>		<u>100%100%</u>	
	(119 106)		(66 158)		(66 158)		(38 186)		(34 190)	
GAMMAS =	-.036		-.081		.116		-.219		.424	
									-.046	

<u>ACTIVITY</u>	<u>NEW YORK</u>									
	<u>HOME</u>		<u>PLAYED</u>		<u>PLAYED</u>		<u>PLAYED</u>		<u>READ</u>	
	<u>WORK</u>		<u>OUTDOORS</u>		<u>INDOORS</u>		<u>ALONE</u>		<u>LISTENED</u>	
	<u>YES</u>	<u>NO</u>	<u>YES</u>	<u>NO</u>	<u>YES</u>	<u>NO</u>	<u>YES</u>	<u>NO</u>	<u>YES</u>	<u>NO</u>
<u>VIEWING</u>										
<u>LEVEL</u>										
<u>(HOURS)</u>										
0-1	39%	10%	19%	31%	35%	26%	16%	31%	55%	25%
1-2	37	40	24	40	28	40	21	40	36	36
2-3	12	20	14	12	10	14	26	10	0	14
3+	22	30	43	17	28	21	37	19	9	24
N=	<u>100%100%</u>		<u>100%100%</u>		<u>100%100%</u>		<u>100%100%</u>		<u>100%100%</u>	
	(93 10)		(21 81)		(29 73)		(19 83)		(11 91)	
GAMMAS =	.330		-.399		.016		-.429		.546	
									.156	

LONDON

<u>ACTIVITY</u> <u>VIEWING</u> <u>LEVEL</u> <u>(HOURS)</u>	<u>HOME</u> <u>WORK</u>		<u>PLAYED</u> <u>OUTDOORS</u>		<u>PLAYED</u> <u>INDOORS</u>		<u>PLAYED</u> <u>ALONE</u>		<u>READ</u>		<u>LISTENED</u> <u>TO MUSIC</u>	
	<u>YES</u>	<u>NO</u>	<u>YES</u>	<u>NO</u>	<u>YES</u>	<u>NO</u>	<u>YES</u>	<u>NO</u>	<u>YES</u>	<u>NO</u>	<u>YES</u>	<u>NO</u>
0-1	42%	38%	42%	36%	49%	34%	37%	31%	61%	33%	38%	39%
1-2	27	31	27	33	24	33	37	29	17	33	13	32
2-3	8	15	13	13	11	14	5	15	4	15	25	12
3+	23	17	18	18	16	19	21	18	17	18	25	18
N=	100% (26	100% 96)	100% (45	100% 77)	100% (37	100% 85)	100% (19	100% 103)	100% (23	100% 99)	100% (8	100% 114)
GAMMAS=	.022		.059		.189		0.0		.346		-.160	

London children who participated in every non-video activity listed in Table 7.6, except for reading and playing indoors, spent about as much time watching television as did those children not engaging in these activities. London children who chose to read and play indoors with friends tended to watch significantly less television than did the non-readers.

We see much less consistent findings in the New York sample. New York children who did homework and read for pleasure on the preceding day tended to watch significantly fewer minutes of television than those children not participating in these activities. However, New York children who played outdoors and played games alone tended to watch more television than did children not participating in these activities. Weak associations, at best, existed between participation in the other activities listed in Table 7.6, and total television viewing time for the New York respondents.

Of all the non-video activities, only reading for pleasure seemed to displace television viewing in London and New York. New York crosstabulation tables showed that 55% of the weekday readers watched less than one hour of television as opposed to 25% of the weekday non-readers. In London, 61% of the readers as opposed to 33% of the non-readers watched less than one hour of television. For both samples, children who read books were nearly twice as likely to watch low levels of television as were the non-readers. Much smaller percentage differences were observed for the higher television time categories.

These figures, while very striking, do not conclusively establish any clear cause and effect relationship between reading and amount of television viewing because we cannot determine whether reading or television viewing is the antecedent variable. That is, we do not know if these readers would have watched more television if they had not read books. Until more conclusive findings are shown, educators and parents should not believe that forcing students and children to read or do homework, will automatically reduce the time spent watching TV.

The question of television displacement by other non-video activities becomes more complicated when we recognize that in New York, significantly higher percentages of children who went outside to play and who played games alone also watched higher amounts of television than children who did not participate in these activities. Of the New York children who played outdoors on the preceding day, 43% watched three or more hours of

television, as compared to only 17% of the children who did not play outdoors. Likewise, 37% of the children who played games alone watched three or more hours of television, as compared to only 19% of the children who did not play games. Apparently, high level viewers are able to find the time to play and also watch many hours of television, if both activities are deemed to be important gratifiers.

Medrich et al. (1982) showed that children have varying degrees of commitment to video and non-video activities. While a child's available leisure time is finite, many different activities can be, and are squeezed into, this limited time. Thus, children who are equally devoted to both television viewing and outdoor playing or television viewing and game playing might very well decide not to sacrifice one of these activities for the other, but rather, choose to do both. Blumler (1985:57) believes that in "some social settings, media sources may complement, enrich, or express in different forms what non-media sources do-instead of offering only alternative outlets for what the latter could supply." Since children were not able to recall how much time they spent doing most non-video activities, we can only assume that the children who watched three or more hours of television spent less time playing outdoors or indoors than did children who watched television for lesser amounts of time.

These findings must be interpreted very cautiously. The very small number of children who watched three or more hours of television and played outdoors or indoors on

the previous day must restrict our analysis of how and why they make their choices. Also, not having interviews with parents limits our ability to determine how parental attitudes and behavior influence children's participation in various activities. However, we will see in Chapter 8 that parents probably do give direct and indirect signals to children about which activities and behaviors should be selected.

SUMMARY

Although tentative, the findings point to a micro-analytical, psycho-social approach rather than a macro-analytical approach to children's non-video leisure time activities. It has been shown that similar percentages of London and New York children tended to select and pursue the same types of non-video leisure time activities. The only significant differences occurred in categories of homework and playing outdoors and these differences were explained primarily by each city's educational policy, environmental and ecological characteristics rather than children's socio-cultural backgrounds.

We have also seen that while males and females tended to have fairly different attitudes towards many kinds of video and non-video activities, the relative differences were very similar for both London and New York gender groups. These findings, therefore, provide further evidence that cultural differences are not as highly associated with many kinds of children's leisure-time activity choices than are psycho-social traits shared by all children who live in large, urban areas.

In both New York and London, Blacks were less likely to play outdoors and indoors with friends than were children in other ethnic groups. We hypothesized that because there were so few Black children in the samples and because they were not widely accepted by children in the other ethnic groups, Blacks did not have as many opportunities to socialize with their peers as did the children in the other ethnic groups.

We could not draw firm conclusions regarding television displacement by non-video activities. However, the one consistent finding in New York and London was in the reading for pleasure category, whereby readers tended to have significantly lower viewing levels than non-readers.

CHAPTER EIGHTFAMILY STRUCTURE, INTRA-FAMILIAL INTERACTIONS AND VIDEO MEDIA

In their classic study of British children's television viewing habits, Himmelweit et al. (1958:383) concluded, "Television, although centered in the home, does not greatly strengthen family ties, even though it may offer a spurious sense of unity." This finding was based on evidence that for most families in the sample, television viewing drew all family members into a single room at the same time in order to share a common visual and aural experience. But, in spite of the physical proximity of the family members during televiewing, Himmelweit found that little communication actually occurred.

Himmelweit's study was conducted at a time when only 50% of the British public owned television sets and when few programs were broadcast. Television was a novelty. Great interest and attention was accorded to the few programs which were available to single-set households. During the relatively brief viewing periods afforded to families, television acted as a magnet which not only physically drew family members to within a few feet of its screen, but also focused each person's attention to the program itself, thereby impeding, if not arresting the flow of conversation between viewers. Implicit in Himmelweit's previously cited conclusion is the belief that while physical proximity is a necessary pre-condition of social interaction, proximity definitely does not, in and of itself, insure family unity as defined by meaningful

intra-familial communication.

Himmelweit's findings were very specific to the time and locale of her study, so many of her findings might not be applicable to today's generation of televiewers. Audiences who had little or no prior experience with television programming probably watched television programs with much greater fascination and amazement than today's audiences, who have been exposed to television since birth. Because current audiences have access to much more programming and video related options than did the first audiences, they may have a more casual, but no less intense, interest in television as well as more routinized viewing habits than was the case for the first generation of set owners in the early 1950s. Himmelweit's focus on family unity and television viewing behavior which was posited nearly 30 years ago should, therefore, be reexamined today, particularly in light of the nearly universal ownership of household television sets and the technological innovations associated with television related media.

This chapter will describe the household viewing behavior of the New York and London families. We will see that the findings presented in this chapter support Himmelweit's position that television viewing is not associated with family cohesion, even though most children do regularly watch with other family members. Because little conversation occurs while parents and children view television together and because children and parents often view in their respective bedrooms, very little meaningful communication and interaction actually occurred between

respondents, parents and siblings. Consequently, at best, a very tenuous sense of family unity can be said to exist when children watch television with their parents; at worst, television viewing can encourage extreme isolation between family members.

Many children did not watch TV with their parents. These children, consequently, had no communication with their parents during the viewing period. The data will show that children who had a TV in their bedrooms were more likely to view alone (and not interact with other family members during the viewing periods) than were non-owners of bedroom TV sets. Similarly, parents who had a TV in their bedrooms were more likely to have children who viewed alone than were non-owners.

The uses-gratifications approach suggests that each family member uses television and other video items to gratify their own specific psychological and social needs. We will see, for example, that when parents want to have some private time away from their children, they often purchase TVs for their children's bedrooms and their own bedrooms.

However, each person's gratification needs can also compete with the needs of others. TV related disputes do frequently occur. In many cases, parents resolve these conflicts by purchasing additional TVs for their homes.

Television Placement and its Use

Television sets are placed in the most central and prominent positions in the home. They are perched atop pedestals and accorded the kind of rapt attention any

minister would envy. If television sets have not yet been elevated to the status of a secularized family icon, one can argue, based on the evidence in this chapter, that they increasingly function as the family's baby sitter, teacher, amusement arcade, fantasy maker, movie theater, data bank, and general opiate. Winick (1987:226) added that "TV punctuates the day of the week by establishing the rhythm of the day of the week, contributing to the mental set for different parts of the day and evening, serving to distinguish one day from another, and providing a predictable ritual." And, paradoxically, television sets are also becoming trivialized household fixtures existing to do no more than occupy space and produce sights and sounds.

Previous research provides a wealth of information about how family members use television. Medrich et al. (1978) found that 84% of the families in his California sample had their sets on for most of the evening, 61% had their sets on most of the afternoons and 59% had the set on during dinner. In our study, 33% of the families (39% of the London sample and 29% of the New York sample) indicated that they almost always had the television on while the family was eating dinner.

While all these figures suggest that most households had at least one television on during most of the day, they do not necessarily indicate whether people were actually watching television, nor whether much attention was being paid to the programs. These omissions prevent us from determining whether all this supposed televiewing had any significant effects on family behavior.

Bechtel et al. (1971) demonstrated that among the sample of 20 households intensely monitored with a camera for six days, nearly half of the time that the television was on, viewers were either engaged in activities unrelated to television viewing or they were not even in the same room as the television. They had, however, indicated in diaries that they did "watch" television during these same periods! This study shows, among other things, that we should not think of television viewing as a static activity. Rather, televiewing appears to be integrated into the normal routines of family members, being either ignored or attended to, depending on the viewers' other activities and disposition.

Our interview data tends to confirm Bechtel's findings, insofar as many children indicated that they engaged in non-television related activities while viewing television. Children used the telephone, played games, played with toys, ate, and conversed with family members during the viewing period. Very few children said that they did no other activities while watching television during the previous day.

All these non-video activities and TV viewing were equally important to children. Children were, consequently, likely to devote their attention to non-video activities and the TV by simultaneously engaging in both types of activities.

TELEVISION PLACEMENT IN THE HOME

Parents buy television sets and decide where they will be placed in the home. These decisions structure the

household environment and influence the patterns of familial interactions. If it is true that "parents who place a great deal of emphasis on family relations and the interpersonal nature of those relations seem to be very sensitive to and to some extent, in control of the viewing behaviors of children," (Abel, 1976:335) they would presumably be in control of the viewing environment as well. Television viewing is an interactive process whereby parents and siblings influence how and what children learn from television (Reid, 1979).

The cited literature suggests that social and environmental factors can influence how children use television, and these various uses can in turn, either enhance or inhibit peer and familial interactions. This chapter will further expand on these very important uses of televiewing by examining the viewing environment of homes and analyzing why parents choose to place television sets in their children's bedrooms, why they themselves own and use TVs in their bedrooms, and how such use affects their children's viewing companions and behavior.

Children's Viewing Companions

Since communication is an important family activity, we will examine if and how television viewing affects familial interactions. But first, we must see whether children view television in the same room as their siblings and parents. Lyle and Hoffman (1972) found that among first graders, 37% watched with siblings, 27% watched with both siblings and parents, 8% only with

parents, 14% watched half of the time alone and half of the time with another undesignated person, 11% watched mostly alone and 3% watched with friends.

The viewing companions for the present group of nine-to-eleven year olds (fourth and fifth graders) were similar to those of the Lyle and Hoffman study. (See Table 8.1.) But the New York-London frequencies did have significant differences, particularly in the parent and sibling viewing category. These differences suggest that cultural attitudes towards television might influence the quality and quantity of intra-familial interactions.

Family Interactions and Television Viewing

Table 8.1 shows the percentage of New York and London interviewed children who watched television with various viewing companions. According to the data in this table, most children watched television with at least one family member for at least part of the previous day's viewing period. But the New Yorkers' viewing companions differed from the Londoners.

TABLE 8.1: CHILDREN'S TELEVISION VIEWING COMPANIONS
(NEW YORK AND LONDON INTERVIEWEES)

<u>ALL VIEWING WITH:</u>	<u>NEW YORK</u>	<u>LONDON</u>	<u>ENTIRE SAMPLE</u>
SIBLINGS AND/OR PEERS	38%	19%	28%
PARENT(S) AND SIBLINGS	15	31	24
ONLY PARENT(S)	6	14	10
ALONE	19	7	12
 <u>PART-TIME VIEWING WITH:</u>			
ALONE-OTHERS	18	18	18
PARENTS-OTHERS	4	8	6
N =	<u>100%</u> (117)	<u>100%</u> (154)	<u>100%</u> (271)

Thirty-eight percent of the New York children did all of their television viewing with siblings and/or other minors on the preceding day, as compared with 19% of the London children. Nineteen percent of the New Yorkers watched alone, as compared with 7% of the Londoners, but 31% of the London sample did all of their viewing with parents and siblings as compared with only 15% of the New York sample and 14% of the London children did all their televiewing with only their parents as contrasted with 6% of the New York sample. The remainder of the children did some of their viewing either alone or with a combination of companions.

These figures demonstrate that London children were much more likely to spend their televiewing time with their parents than were New York children. New York children, on the other hand, were much more likely to

watch television alone or to watch only with peers (and presumably with less adult supervision) than were London children. We will see in Table 8.2 that the quality of the time spent viewing television, from the point of view of conversation, to be radically different among the London and New York children, since the people involved in conversations were so different.

The fact that family members watch television in the same room should not automatically lead to a presumption that communication or meaningful interactions are occurring. Brady et al.(1980), Honig (1983) and Himmelweit et al. (1958) have shown that while some physical and verbal contacts usually occur between parent and child while they watch television together, relatively little extended conversations or communication occurs.

When conversation does occur, Lyle and Hoffman (1972) found television conversation to be second only to school events as a topic among school age children. The present study found that while some form of verbal interaction did occur between family members while watching television, the actual conversation topics varied considerably with the child's viewing companions: Children who viewed with their parents tended to discuss the television program being watched, while children who viewed with their siblings and peers tended to discuss personal topics.

In the questionnaire, children were asked how frequently they discuss television programs with their parents. In the interviews, children were asked if they spoke to other viewing companions on the preceding day, and if so, the topic of conversation. Table 8.2 will

present this information.

Among all of the questionnaire respondents, 40% replied that they hardly ever discuss television programs with their parents, 47% said that they sometimes discuss programs with parents, while only 12% said that they almost always discuss programs with their parents. There were very small percentage differences for each of these three categories among the New York-London respondents.

The complementary interview question showed that 55% of the entire sample did talk to a viewing companion while viewing television, with 60% of the Londoners answering in the affirmative as opposed to only 49% of the New Yorkers. These figures apparently reflect the larger percentage of New York children who said they watched television alone during the preceding day and, consequently, would not have had any television conversations.

While some of the respondents hardly ever discuss television programs with their parents because they usually do not view in the same room with their parents, many other children did watch television with their parents yet still had no conversation during the viewing time. In the interviews, many children said that their parents did not want discussions to occur while the family was watching television, because their "parents couldn't hear." One English girl graphically proclaimed that she and her siblings tried to talk while watching television "...but my parents said, 'Shut-up and keep quiet.'"

For those children who indicated in the interview that they conversed with other family members while viewing television, a follow-up question asked children to

describe the topic of conversation. Table 8.2 presents this information.

TABLE 8.2: CHILDREN'S CONVERSATION TOPICS WHILE VIEWING TV
(INTERVIEWEES)

<u>TOPIC</u>	<u>NEW YORK</u>	<u>LONDON</u>	<u>ENTIRE SAMPLE</u>
PROGRAMS BEING WATCHED	39%	75%	60%
PERSONAL (NON- SCHOOL RELATED)	25	7	14%
SCHOOL RELATED TOPICS	12	1	5
COULD NOT REMEMBER THE TOPIC	18	12	14
COMBINATIONS OF ABOVE	6	5	7
	<u>100%</u>	<u>100%</u>	<u>100%</u>
N =	(61)	(87)	(148)

Of the entire sample who had a television conversation, 60% said that they discussed the programs being watched. Some children spent more time talking about the commercials than the actual programs. One London boy said that he talked about the programs because his mother did not speak English very well and needed his help in order to understand the program plots.

This latter comment was mentioned by 10 Other Non-English speaking children in London and New York, clearly showing that some children with non-English speaking parents assume the role of translator/teacher while viewing television. These children most likely paid particular attention to the television programs since they eventually had to summarize the plots to their parents.

Of the entire sample who had television conversations, 14% discussed personal, non-school related

matters and 5% discussed school topics while viewing television. Only 6% of the 32 children in these two categories watched television exclusively with their parents, while 35% watched exclusively with siblings and other peers. The remainder watched with some combination of peers and adults. These findings strongly suggest that a child's topic of conversation varies considerably with the age of his viewing companions; children seemed to feel more comfortable talking about personal and peer related topics with their peers than with their parents.

Fourteen percent of the television conversationalists said that they did talk while viewing television, but could not remember the topic of conversation. Some of these children said they played and talked with younger siblings, but "weren't really watching TV." One English boy said, "I watched television with my brother but I don't like to. He's a nuisance and he's noisy." This recurring theme of children playing and arguing with peers while watching television suggests that some form of non-television related conversation did occur quite regularly among children. In these instances, the presence of a television was almost incidental to the interactions which are occurring. (See previous section regarding television viewing and non-television related activities.)

Various combinations of these three conversation topic categories received no more than 2% of the replies. For most, but definitely not all of the children who talked while the television was on, the television program appeared to be the catalyst for the discussion. But for a sizable minority percentage of the entire sample,

television viewing appeared to play an indirect role, at best, as a conversation stimulator, insofar as the television often drew children, peers and parents together into the same room, but it did not foster conversation between family members.

However, when we look at this same question for the New York-London sample, we see a very different distribution of responses. London children were nearly twice as likely to have non-personal conversations about the programs being watched than were New York children. Conversely, New York children were almost five times as likely to have personal or school-related conversations than were London children.

It is possible to speculate about why London and New York children have such strikingly different topics of conversation while watching television. One possibility might lie with demographic differences between cities and the different configurations of television viewing companions, since conversational topics were related to the age and status of the conversants.

We saw in Table 8.1 that New York children were nearly three times as likely to view alone and twice as likely to view only with peers and/or siblings as were London children. London children were twice as likely to do all their viewing with either their parents or their parents and siblings as were New Yorkers. Consequently, much higher percentages of London children also limited their television topics to the program being watched than did the New York children while higher percentages of New York children conversed exclusively about personal matters

than did the London children.

Looking at the children who discussed only the programs being watched, we found 8% of the London children viewed exclusively with their parents and 29% of the Londoners viewed together with their parents and siblings, as compared to only 3% of the New York sample who viewed exclusively with their parents and only 8% who viewed together with their parents and siblings. Conversely, for children who exclusively discussed school and/or personal topics, only 2% of the London sample viewed only with siblings and peers as compared with 21% of the New York sample.

These findings show that significantly higher percentages of London children watched television with their parents and higher percentages appear to confine their television conversations to rather impersonal discussions about the programs being watched than did New York students. On the other hand, higher percentages of New York children viewed television exclusively with peers and these children devoted their television conversation time to more personal, peer related subjects than did London children.

Television viewing seems to be a catalyst that drew many family members into the same room, but it does not appear to be as important an influence on the kinds of interactions occurring during the shared viewing time as were the children's particular viewing companions.

Conversations about television programs and about personal and school related matters can be important to a child's intellectual and emotional development. We cannot

say that either type of conversation is relatively more beneficial to the child than the other. But we can say that each type of conversation is apt to arise when the child alternately watches television with parents or siblings and that each seems to gratify its own set of needs.

Some children did not have any conversations either because they watched alone or because their companions did not encourage any conversation. In the absence of any formal, longitudinal studies, we can only speculate that children who spent a great deal of time watching television alone and/or watching with other people but with virtually no verbal interactions, are apt to develop serious social and/or cognitive difficulties as a result of this lack of intellectual stimulation.

Solo Viewers

According to previously cited literature, a great majority of children usually view television with other family members. For most households, television viewing is a leisure time activity, whereby children, siblings and adults gather in the same room, at the same time in order to share a common experience. If family unity were defined by just these facts, then we could say that television viewing promotes family unity. However, if we further define family unity to include verbal interactions between parents, children and siblings, then television viewing would not be seen as a promoter of family unity since many children did not converse with their viewing companions.

Although the present study generally confirms the findings of previous research regarding children's viewing companions, this study also found that on any given day, a sizable segment of the nine-to-eleven year old sample watched television alone. For these children, we can safely say that familial interactions could not, and did not occur during the solo viewing sessions.

Media effects studies have not produced consistent findings on whether television viewing has harmful effects on children's social and cognitive development. Nonetheless, it can be said that if television viewing functions as an entertainment or means of psychological escape, then solo television viewing in the privacy of one's bedroom might additionally be seen as an avenue of physical escape from contact with others. We should then be concerned about children who are excessive solo viewers.

Nearly 25% of the total respondents indicated on the questionnaire that they almost always watch television alone, while only 21% said that they hardly ever watch television alone. The remaining 55% said they watch television alone some days. The New York-London figures were very similar, although the proportion of New York students who said that they almost always watch alone was eight percentage points higher than for London students.

The questionnaire also asked children to indicate how frequently they viewed television with their siblings, friends and parents. Twenty percent of both samples answered that they hardly ever watch television with their siblings and friends and 19% answered that they hardly

ever watch television with their parents.(1) While the New York-London distributions were similar for most viewing companion categories, we did find that the proportion of London students who said that they hardly ever view with their peers was 11 percentage points higher than for New York students.

Finally, complementary interview questions asked children whether they watched television alone on the preceding day and, if they watched television with other people, who these people were. (See Table 8.1 for other categories of viewing companions.) For all interviewed children, 18% watched alone for part of the previous day and with others for the balance of the time (this was the same percentage for the New York and London samples). These figures do not include the interviewees who did all their viewing alone on the previous day.

The above stated questionnaire and interview figures demonstrate that approximately 30% of the sample estimated that they usually watch television alone and that another 30% of the sample said that they watched television alone for at least part of the previous day. In addition, these questionnaire and follow-up interview percentage breakdowns for children's viewing partners allow us to cross-validate these two sets of responses and cautiously conclude that because the two sets of figures are so similar, they are also fairly reliable.

The findings given above show that a sizable percentage of children (and a significantly higher percentage of New York children than London children) chose to view television alone. For these children,

television viewing seemed to isolate family members from each other, discouraging children from interacting and communicating with their parents and siblings. Since we have seen from previous research that parents can and do mitigate many negative effects of television if they watch with their children (Reid, 1979), children who do a great deal of viewing alone are losing quality time with their parents and possibly experiencing some negative effects from television because of the lack of parental supervision during their viewing time.

On the other hand, a sizable majority of both New York and London students did watch television with parents and siblings. As we saw in the previous section of this chapter, when children did watch television with other family members, verbal communication occurred fairly frequently. Also, these interactions were greatly affected by the child's viewing partner; i.e., the topics of conversation varied considerably depending upon whether the children viewed with their parents or viewed with their peers.

Correlates of Solo Viewing

Interview responses showed that some children were quite happy to view alone in order to have some time away from their parents and siblings, while other children wanted to watch television with particular family members but these people did not want to view with them.

This section will explore some factors which appeared to influence a child's decision to view either alone or with particular family members. Parents and educators

often cite television viewing as a principal barrier to effective parent-child communication. But we will see that the household environment and particularly television sets placed in a parent's and/or child's bedroom, had much greater impact on who watches TV with a child and the kinds of familial interactions than does television viewing per se.

On any given day, many children who had television sets in their bedrooms did not use these sets; rather, they still tended to do at least some of their viewing in a common room with other family members. Nonetheless, children who did have bedroom TVs were more likely to use these sets and to view alone than were non-owners.

On the questionnaire, children were asked to identify the room where they usually watch television. They were also asked in which room their parents usually watch television. The resulting crosstabulation of these two variables showed that 70% of the total respondents and their parents usually watch in the same room, with over 62% of the total respondents and parents usually viewing television in the livingroom. As expected from previously cited solo viewing figures, only 59% of the New York children said that they usually watch in the same room as their parents as compared with 89% of the London students. These figures tend to validate the previously discussed interview figures for children's viewing companions during the previous day, since those figures showed that the proportion of New York students who watched television with their parents for at least part of the day was 28 percentage points less than among London students.

The next section will focus on these solo viewers discussing variables apparently associated with children who view alone rather than with other family members.

Multi-set Households, Bedroom TVs and Television Viewing Companions

As we will see, the likelihood of parents and children owning a bedroom television is highly correlated with the number of household television sets. Children and parents who had a television in their rooms were more likely to spend this viewing time in their respective bedrooms, apart from other family members, than were non-owners of bedroom sets.

Bower's study (1973) found a positive relationship between the number of television sets in the household and the likelihood for children to view alone. Among multi-set households in Bower's sample, only 12% of the families usually watched television in the same room, but among single-set households, this figure rose to 55%.

Bower's figures did not consider the number of people in the household as well as the number of TVs in the household as factors which influence whether children view alone or with other family members. If a family owns just one TV, then all members of the household who want to view TV must watch in the same room. As the number of TVs increase in relation to the number of people in the household, opportunities to view in separate areas of the house (and, presumably, to view alone) would also tend to increase.

Figures in Table 8.3 generally confirmed this supposition: There was a strong negative relationship

between the number of TVs per family member and the percentage of children who watched television with their parents and, conversely, a positive relationship between the number of TVs per capita and the percentage of children who viewed TV alone.

TABLE 8.3: THE RELATIONSHIP OF PER CAPITA HOUSEHOLD TELEVISION SETS ON CHILDREN'S VIEWING COMPANIONS IN NEW YORK AND LONDON (INTERVIEWEES ONLY)

	<u>NEW YORK</u>		<u>LONDON</u>		<u>ENTIRE</u>	<u>SAMPLE</u>
<u>PER CAPITA</u>	<u>LESS</u>	<u>MORE</u>	<u>LESS</u>	<u>MORE</u>	<u>LESS</u>	<u>MORE</u>
<u>TVS</u>	<u>THAN</u>	<u>THAN</u>	<u>THAN</u>	<u>THAN</u>	<u>THAN</u>	<u>THAN</u>
	<u>.60</u>	<u>.60</u>	<u>.60</u>	<u>.60</u>	<u>.60</u>	<u>.60</u>
<u>VIEWING</u>						
<u>COMPANIONS</u>						
PARENTS AND						
SIBLINGS	11%	24%	50%	33%	41%	28%
ALONE	7	22	3	9	4	17
N =	(28)	(82)	(88)	(54)	(116)	(136)
CRAMER'S V=	.224		.173		.162	

The partial tables presented in Table 8.3 show that 41% of the children in households with few TVs (less than .60 televisions per family member) did all their television viewing with their parents and siblings on the preceding day, as compared with 28% of the children in households with many TVs (more than .6 television sets per family member). Conversely, only 4% of the children in households with few TVs viewed alone on the preceding day as compared with 17% of the children with many TVs.

While these figures confirm the hypothesis that the likelihood of children watching television alone increases as the number of household TVs increase, we should notice that New York children who had a high ratio of TVs were

twice as likely to view TV with all their family members present than were children with a low ratio of TVs. The data cannot explain why this outcome occurred in New York and not in London.

Nearly every household in both samples had a TV in the living room or den. Forty-six percent of the multi-set households had a television set in a child's bedroom and 58% of multi-set households had a TV in the parents' bedroom. Therefore, the number of household television sets in relation to the number of family members might have had less of an impact on a child's viewing companion (or whether the child viewed alone) than did the placement of a television in the child's bedroom and/or the parents' bedroom.

The data presented in Tables 8.4 and 8.5 show, respectively, the relationship between having a television in children's bedrooms and children's viewing companions and having a television in parents' bedrooms and children's viewing companions. We will see that children were more likely to view television alone for at least part of the day if the children and/or their parents had a bedroom television than if they and/or their parents did not have a television in their bedroom. The implication of this hypothesis is that the uses and gratifications of bedroom television ownership and usage might explain why family members spend considerable amounts of time in separate rooms of the house during the viewing hours.

TABLE 8.4: THE RELATIONSHIP OF HAVING A TV IN A CHILD'S
BEDROOM AND CHILDREN'S VIEWING COMPANIONS
(INTERVIEWEES)

<u>TV IN BEDROOM</u>	<u>NEW YORK</u>		<u>LONDON</u>		<u>ENTIRE SAMPLE</u>	
	<u>YES</u>	<u>NO</u>	<u>YES</u>	<u>NO</u>	<u>YES</u>	<u>NO</u>
<u>ALL VIEWING WITH:</u>						
SIBLINGS AND/OR PEERS	32%	43%	9%	25%	25%	31%
PARENT(S) AND PEERS	15	16	23	31	18	26
ONLY PARENT(S)	6	7	23	13	11	11
ALONE	20	16	5	6	16	9
<u>PART-TIME VIEWING WITH:</u>						
ALONE-OTHERS	22	16	36	15	26	15
PARENT(S)-OTHERS	4	2	5	9	4	7
N =	100% (54)	100% (56)	100% (22)	100% (119)	100% (76)	100% (175)
CRAMER'S V =	.238		.311		.232	

For the entire interviewed sample, 42% of the children who had a television in their room viewed television alone, at least for part of the preceding day, as compared with 24% of the children who did not own a television in their bedroom (16% of the set owners did all their viewing alone on the preceding day, as compared with only 9% of the non-owners). In general, non-owners were somewhat more likely to view together with their parents and/or peers than were set-owners.

When we take into account the city of residence, we again see that both New York and London bedroom set owners were more likely to view alone for at least part of the day (42% and 41%, respectively) than were non-set owners

(32% and 21%, respectively).

However, when we look at the New York children who watched television with their parents and siblings (and/or other peers) together, we see virtually identical percentages for the set and non-set owners (15% as compared to 16%, respectively) although for the London children there are somewhat lower percentages for the set owners as compared to the non-set owners (23% as compared to 31%, respectively).

When we examined the effect of bedroom television usage on children's viewing behavior, as opposed to bedroom television ownership, we found that 48% of the 48 children in the entire sample who said on the questionnaire that they usually watch television in their bedrooms also said that they almost always view television alone, as compared with only 20% of the 275 children who usually watch in the living room.

These questionnaire figures support related interview figures which show that 26% of the 27 respondents who usually watch television in their bedrooms in fact did watch entirely alone on the preceding day as compared with only 9% of the 193 respondents who watched television in the living room. All these figures are very similar for both the New York and London samples.

The questionnaire and interview figures suggest that children were more likely to view alone if they owned and used bedroom TVs than if they did not. These figures seem to confirm the widely held belief that parents who decide to place a television set in their child's bedroom are encouraging their children to watch television alone.

The interviews did uncover some explanations for children's decisions to either use or not use their bedroom television sets. Many children indicated in the interview that the living room television was "better than their own television" because it had a larger screen. In fact, when pressed for more reasons for their preference for the living room television, children often said that the living room was "more comfortable" or that they preferred "to watch with other family members". The solo viewers, on the other hand, suggested that they watched alone in their rooms because "their parents or siblings were watching something else in the living room," or because their parents sent them to their rooms as a punishment. Several children mentioned that their "parents like to watch TV in their own room." Other solo viewers said that they just "wanted to be alone."

The implication of the above discussion is that most children wanted to watch TV in a common room of the house and, in fact, did watch with other family members. Most of these viewers appeared to be making rather purposeful choices to watch television with their parents and/or siblings. Many of the solo viewers, however, seemed to retreat to their rooms because their parents wanted them to do so or because the children wanted to have time away from other family members. The solo viewers seemed to be responding negatively to conditions in their houses when they withdrew to their rooms, as contrasted with the group viewers who reacted positively to family conditions. For some children, viewing alone is not a gratifying behavior. But this type of viewing behavior apparently does gratify

parents' needs to have time away from their children.

parents who own bedroom television sets and solo television viewing

There are two important ways for children to become solo viewers: They can retreat to their bedrooms and watch alone or parents can retreat to their bedrooms, thereby leaving their children alone. We will see that parents with a television in their bedrooms chose to view television in their bedrooms rather than common room areas, and significantly higher percentages of parents with bedroom televisions sets also had children who viewed alone than did parents who did not have televisions in their bedrooms.

Forty-six percent of the total sample indicated that their parents owned a bedroom television. The New York and London ownership figures are 60% and 29%, respectively. Since we saw in Table 3.1 that only 53% of the New York children and 14% of the London children had bedroom TVs, we can safely conclude that parents in both cities are more likely to buy a television for their own bedrooms than for their children's bedrooms.

Table 8.5 shows the relationship between owning a television in the parents' bedroom and children's viewing companions. The table shows that parents who have a bedroom TV are much more likely to have children who view alone or only with peers than are parents who do not have a bedroom TV.

TABLE 8.5: THE RELATIONSHIP OF HAVING A TV IN THE PARENTS' BEDROOM ON CHILDREN'S VIEWING COMPANIONS (INTERVIEWEES)

	<u>NEW YORK</u>		<u>LONDON</u>		<u>ENTIRE</u>	<u>SAMPLE</u>
<u>TV IN BEDROOM</u>	<u>YES</u>	<u>NO</u>	<u>YES</u>	<u>NO</u>	<u>YES</u>	<u>NO</u>
<u>ALL VIEWING WITH:</u>						
SIBLINGS AND/OR PEERS	38%	36%	26%	21%	34%	26%
PARENT(S) AND PEERS	18	14	18	34	18	28
ONLY PARENT(S)	2	14	13	16	6	15
ALONE	21	14	13	3	18	6
<u>PART-TIME VIEWING WITH:</u>						
ALONE-OTHERS	18	21	18	18	18	19
PARENT(S)-OTHERS	3	2	11	8	6	6
N =	<u>100%</u> (66)	<u>100%</u> (44)	<u>100%</u> (38)	<u>100%</u> (103)	<u>100%</u> (104)	<u>100%</u> (147)
CRAMER'S V =	.238		.239		.255	

For the entire interviewed sample, 18% of the parents who had a television in their bedrooms also had children who were completely alone while viewing television during the previous day as opposed to only 6% of the non-owners (nearly identical percentages of the parent owners and non-owners had children who watched alone for part of the preceding day).

Looking at this question in a different way, of the 28 children in the entire sample who did all of their televiewing alone during the preceding day, 68% had parents who had a television in their bedrooms. Of the 28 children who did all their televiewing with their parents on the preceding day, only 21% had parents who had a

television in their bedrooms.

Questionnaire figures similarly show that of the 81 children in the entire sample whose parents usually watch television in their own bedrooms, 30% of the children "almost always" watch television alone, 54% "sometimes" watch alone and only 16% "hardly ever" watch alone.

Similarly, 21% of the 43 respondents who said their parents usually watched TV in their bedrooms watched alone on the preceding day as compared with only 8% of the 184 respondents who said their parents usually watch TV in the living room.

It should also be noted that 30% of the children with a television in their bedrooms usually watch in their bedrooms, but 43% of the respondents whose parents had a bedroom television reported that their parents usually watch in their own bedrooms. Previously cited TV ownership figures and these figures tend to show that while both children and parents often made use of their respective bedroom television sets, parents were more likely to purchase a television for their own bedroom than for their children's bedroom and were also more likely to use these bedroom sets than were their children.

These figures suggest that parents who own a television in their bedrooms are much more likely to have children who view alone and these parents are much less likely to view with their children than are parents who do not own a television in their bedrooms. Clearly, many parents who choose to watch television in their bedrooms are giving a very clear message to their children: They prefer to have their children watch either alone or with

peers and they do not wish to participate in this activity with their children. The uses and gratifications approach to children's media use, at least in this case of solo viewing, focuses more on parents, as agents of control, than on children.

Television as a Source of Family Disputes

In discussing television's influence on family unity and/or disunity, some attention must be paid to the problem of television related arguments between family members.

During the interviews and on the questionnaire, many children reported having conflicts with parents and siblings over television programs to be watched. These conflicts were not surprising when we consider a television as a scarce source of entertainment which cannot be shared very easily, since each family member has quite specific and individualistic entertainment interests.

The questionnaire contained several items asking children how often they had disagreements with various family members about which television program to watch. Thirty-one percent of the children with older brothers and 39% of those with older sisters replied that they hardly ever have television disagreements, while 45% and 43% who have, respectively, younger brothers and sisters said that they hardly ever have disagreements. Most interestingly, 55% of the respondents said that they hardly ever have these kinds of conflicts with parents.

A follow-up questionnaire item asked children how

these disagreements were usually resolved. In 40% of the cases, the parents usually decided what to watch, 26% said that they ultimately decided what to watch, 8% and 5% said that their older siblings and younger siblings, respectively, usually chose the television program to be watched and 22% checked the "other possibility not listed" category.

While these responses do not provide conclusive information about family disputes related to television viewing, it might be possible to make some statements about family interactions, family conflict and the uses and gratifications of television viewing.

The figures seem to show that children had the fewest television conflicts with parents. Most television related tension appeared to erupt between younger and older siblings.

Parents appeared to be the central mediator of these disputes, with 1/4 of the children claiming to get their way when television disputes occurred. We must bear in mind that these responses are based on children's perceptions, rather than verifiable, objective measures. One can be somewhat skeptical about so many children claiming to get their way when disputes occur, since these responses might be reflections of wishful thinking.

Because these figures were fairly similar for both the New York and London samples, we can surmise that cultural background and the greater availability of television sets in New York than in London households do not appear to reduce television conflict between siblings. However, because siblings generally share bedroom

television sets while parents often have their own television, we might want to see if television sets in parents bedrooms significantly reduced program disputes between children and parents.

We, therefore, examined the relationship between the frequency of television disagreements and the room where children and parents watch television. It was hypothesized that children who claim to hardly ever have television disagreements with their parents usually watch television in their own bedrooms, thus avoiding the causes of this type of conflict. The figures presented in Table 8.6 appear to confirm this hypothesis.

TABLE 8.6: THE RELATIONSHIP OF CHILDREN'S VIEWING AREA ON THE FREQUENCY OF TV RELATED DISPUTES WITH PARENTS (QUESTIONNAIRE-ENTIRE SAMPLE)

	<u>ROOM</u>	<u>RESPONDENT</u>	<u>USUALLY</u>	<u>VIEWS</u>	<u>TV</u>
		<u>LIVING ROOM/ DINING ROOM</u>		<u>RESPONDENTS'</u>	<u>BEDROOM</u>
<u>FREQUENCY</u> <u>OF DISPUTES</u>					
HARDLY EVER		54%		70%	
SOME DAYS		32		23	
ALMOST ALWAYS		15		9	
		<u>100%</u>		<u>100%</u>	
N =		(266)		(47)	

CRAMER'S V = .323

Of the children who said that they usually watch in their bedrooms, 70% said that they hardly ever have disagreements with their parents and 9% said that they almost always have disagreements. Of the children who usually watch television in the livingroom/den, only 54% said that they "hardly ever" have parental disagreements

while 15% said that they "almost always" have disagreements. Children who have and use their bedroom television sets appear to be less likely to have television related disputes with their parents (and presumably, other family members) than are children who do not have and use bedroom TVs. The New York and London figures were very similar.

In the interviews, many children answered that when their parents or siblings insisted on watching a program that they did not want to see, they retreated to their bedrooms and watched their "own" programs. Bedroom television sets did not seem to be the household television of choice for children, but it appeared to be a good alternative when disputes occurred in the livingroom.

These figures suggest that higher percentages of children who have and use bedroom television sets do have fewer television conflicts with their parents than do children who watch television in the livingroom, presumably with other family members. The implication of this finding is that one reason why many parents purposefully provide television sets for their children's bedrooms is because they want to eliminate a potential source of family conflict, in particular, conflicts between themselves and their children which center on which television program will be watched.

SUMMARY

Parents play key roles in determining the conditions under which family members exercise leisure time activity choices. These conditions often structure and constrain

children's behavior.

The uses and gratifications approach helps explain why parents decide to place TVs in their own and/or their children's bedroom. For example, we have seen that parents buy television sets for the household and decide to place them in locales which either encourage or discourage group viewing and group interactions.

Livingroom TVs appear to be associated with family viewing while bedroom TVs appear to be associated with solo viewing. We saw that children were much more likely to be solo TV viewers if they and/or their parents had a bedroom TV than if they did not own bedroom TVs.

A child's decision to view TV alone appears to be an expression of his or her own preference for solitude as well as a parent's need for time away from their children. Bedroom TVs also appear to reduce television related arguments. For these reasons, bedroom TVs are reflections of the needs and gratifications of the child's parents as well as the child.

CHAPTER NINE
DISCUSSION

Parents and teachers often express concern about the amount of time children spend in front of the television and the kinds of programs they watch. Nevertheless, children continue to spend a considerable amount of time viewing TV and watching violent and adult-oriented programs. Legislative bodies in both the United States and Great Britain have responded to parental and educational concerns by sponsoring research studies to see whether TV and VCR viewing is in fact harmful to children.

Despite the inconclusive findings of these and other studies, parents and teachers continue to believe that excessive amounts of viewing and viewing of violent and adult-oriented programming do hurt children by causing them to develop a host of psychological, social and physical problems, including low reading scores, poor study habits, inadequate exercise and physical stamina, psychological problems and infrequent interactions with parents and peers. In effect, a wide variety of harmful effects are being attributed to inanimate, but omnipresent pieces of video-related machinery, even though a cause-effect relationship between video hardware and software usage and children's behavior has not been conclusively established.

The uses-gratification approach to media studies, as typified by laboratory and focus group studies, have helped researchers understand how specific kinds of media presentations are perceived by children. But these kinds

of analyses, which purport to relate media stimuli to audience reactions, do not provide an altogether accurate picture of children's media use during the home viewing hours, since they do not measure how children actually use media. This comparative study has attempted to augment these approaches by describing and analyzing how New York and London children interact with television and video-related items, as these activities occur within the natural setting of their homes, families and social environments. In addition, it allows us to compare and contrast each cities television programming practices and social and environmental conditions and, in turn, to explore how these differences influence children's video and non-video behavior.

This research project has shown that electronic media play important roles in the lives of children as well as their parents. The viewing routines of both parents and their children are influenced by an array of social and environmental factors not directly associated with the video images emanating from the screen.

Video usage does not occur in a vacuum. Rather, it simultaneously interacts with many sub-systems of a child's world, functioning as both a social and a psychological activity. Therefore, if we are to fully understand how children use video apparatus, then we also have to understand the social and psychological contexts within which the video usage behavior occurs.

In the introduction to this study, a uses-gratifications approach was proposed as a method for describing and explaining how children select leisure-time

activities. The underlying premise of this approach is that children are active consumers of leisure activities and tend to engage in those activities which gratify their psychological and social needs. This micro-motivational perspective assumes that children utilize rational, means-ends decision-making processes before making activity selections.

While this approach can account for many types of leisure-time behavior, it has some limitations. The major problem with this approach, as usually adopted, is that it focuses on the child as a consumer of activities, without also considering the impact of the child's social and physical environment on activity behavior. Researchers using the uses-gratifications approach have tended to overlook the needs and gratifications of the child's parents, peer groups, teachers and media programmers and such demographic factors as the child's parents' occupational status, and the child's gender, race and ethnicity.

The data in this study have shown that children do not have a great deal of control over their activity options and choices. We have seen, for example, that children react according to the wishes of agents of social control, such as parents, teachers, and media programmers and weigh the reactions of their peers before they actually pursue any particular activity. Consequently, children often passively make activity choices from a limited menu that has been constructed by the child's parents, TV programmers, and other controlling figures. Or, they are pressured into pursuing unsatisfying

activities by peer group members. As a result, chosen activities do not always gratify children's real or imagined needs.

In order to account for many of the factors which bear upon children's activity choices, this study has applied the uses and gratifications approach to both the child, as a consumer of leisure-time activities, and to the child's parents, who are controllers of these activities. Consequently, this approach should not be seen as "one theory, but rather an umbrella for a rather diverse set of theories and models (Levy and Weidehl, 1985:110-111).

By integrating these complementary perspectives of the uses-gratifications approach, and by also accounting for characteristics associated with the child's social environment, activity choices can be analyzed within the framework of both the child's psycho-social system and physical environment. Thus, we can see the child simultaneously as a purposeful actor who selects from a menu of available leisure activities and as a passive reactor to environmental and social systems which constrain those choices.

Children are highly vulnerable to forces over which they have virtually no control, such as rules of conduct established by adults, social institutions (e.g., schools), neighborhood ecological features, and demographic factors associated with race, ethnicity, parents' occupational status, gender and number of siblings. At the same time, paradoxically, children manage to assert their own individuality by either

accepting, ignoring, or in some circumstances, mitigating the constraints imposed by the outside world.

The data presented in the preceding chapters confirmed the viability of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model by demonstrating that many sub-systems of the child's physical environment interact with the child's psychological, social and intellectual needs, to produce social behavior. Each parent's decision to purchase specific video-related hardware and each child's activity choice is, in effect, a compromise agreement reflecting the needs of the child, the needs of the parents, and the family's socio-economic and cultural status. In other words, the relative strength of the child's needs in relation to the needs and wishes of his parents, and the amount of support afforded to the child by his social and cultural environment largely determine whether the child's needs and wishes have the chance to be gratified.

Perhaps Blumler, Katz and Gurevitch too narrowly restricted the parameters of the uses-gratifications approach because they over emphasized the child as a consumer of activities while under emphasizing the impact of the macro-structural contexts of the child's physical and social environment on these types of behaviors. An expanded version of their description of the uses-gratifications process, as utilized in this study, would start with the child's initial desire to engage in a particular activity because the child wanted to satisfy some psychological and/or social need. But, before that activity could be engaged in, the following supportive conditions would also have to occur:

- 1) The child's parents would allow him to engage in the desired activity.
- 2) The child's physical and/or ecological environment would support the activity.
- 3) Characteristics associated with the child's social and cultural background and intellectual level would encourage and sustain his activity choices.
- 4) The hardware and software needed for the activity would be available to the child.

When one or more of these conditions are absent, the likelihood of the child actually participating in a specific activity choice correspondingly decreases. The following sections will discuss how the data in this study relate to these conditional requisites for children's leisure-time behavior.

RATIONAL-DECISION MAKING AND CHILDREN'S ACTIVITY CHOICES

In order to understand the process by which activity choices are consummated, we must clarify how children initially decide which, of many possible activities, they actually pursue. This section will discuss some of the micro-motivational factors which influence children's activity choices.

Children's Decision-making

A uses-gratifications approach would state that an activity must gratify a need or set of needs or it would not be selected. The micro-motivational focus of this approach assumes that people rationally define the needs to be gratified and rationally pursue the means to achieve

these ends. Data presented in this study show that while most children are capable of employing a rationally based, means-end analysis before choosing a leisure activity, they do not always do so.

One important indication of a rational decision-making process can be seen in children's TV and VCR program selection procedures. Forty-five percent of the entire sample said that they "almost always" plan their TV viewing schedule by consulting a TV listing. An additional 42% said that they use these listings "some days".

Children were particularly aware of the times and channels of favorite TV programs, and expressed enthusiasm and commitment to these shows as well as to specific VCR cassettes. Many children indicated that they hurried home from school in order to watch favorite TV programs. Most children said that they saw the same TV programs and VCR tapes every day. Not only did children know the time and channel of these favored programs, but in the case of VCR tapes, also minute details of the plots, having seen the tapes repeatedly. Children were, therefore, not only conscious of the programs and tapes available to them, but also aware of the programs' ability to gratify some of their needs. These entertainments were actively pursued and, presumably, fulfilled some sets of children's needs.

On the other hand, comments made during the interviews demonstrate that many activity choices did not always lead to particularly gratifying results. For example, many children said that they randomly turned the TV dial in search of an interesting program, or watched only part of a program and then abruptly engaged in

another activity. Consequently, children did not always remember the titles or plots of programs they saw. Other children said that they watched TV or played with their video games only because they had nothing better to do.

Similarly, children frequently decided to play video games and then stopped playing the games after only a few minutes. Likewise, many children watched parts of several TV and VCR programs without ever seeing the entire programs. A psychological explanation for this type of viewing behavior was inferred from the New York and London TV and VCR viewing figures. These data suggested that since the average child has a viewing threshold of approximately three hours, he will pursue other, non-video activities upon reaching his own viewing limit.

An alternative view of the uses-gratifications approach helps explain, in part, why children intentionally decide to engage in an activity when they apparently do not really want to pursue it. While some children have short attention spans and probably would not engage in any activity for an extended period of time, it is more likely that some children never reflect on the kinds of gratification they hope to receive from a prospective activity, prior to engaging in that activity. Instead, they impulsively choose one activity after another, until they encounter one that eventually seems to meet their needs. A uses-gratifications approach assumes rationality; people cannot always be considered rational decision makers when they are not sure of the ends they wish to pursue.

The macro-structural view of the uses-gratifications

model (which will be discussed in greater detail in the next section) often intersects with the micro-motivational sphere to provide a possible explanation for this example of indecisive behavior. According to Marcusian theory, macro-structural elements such as parents, TV programmers, and other agents of social control presumably decide not to make certain activities and programs available to children so children tend to choose activities by default rather than because of any particular enthusiasm for the activity. Because children do not have complete control of the decision-making process (i.e., they do not construct the menu of options), children are prone to exhibit very little enthusiasm for the activities they ultimately engage in, and these activities, consequently, prove to be unsatisfying experiences. We must remember that "the audience member is not unconstrainably master of his or her fate...(While) the audience member assuredly has a degree of control...he must pursue goals in a communications arena, where he or she is a target of a host of more organized interests, whose aims are not necessarily those of the audience member" (Blumler et al., 1985:259-260).

The next section discusses parents' decision-making. It will show that parents decide to purchase video items for specific rooms in the house primarily to obtain privacy for themselves and to achieve family tranquility. We will see that parents' video-related decisions influence where, how and with whom children view television.

Parents' Decision-making

Parents play a significant role in the lives of children, both by what they do and what they do not do. While parents were not interviewed, children did provide information about their parents' attitudes and values towards media and personal privacy. This information, in turn, permitted us to learn how micro-motivational factors associated with parents' motives interact with parent influenced, macro-structural environmental factors. This complex interaction affected children's leisure-time behavior and familial interactions.

The data demonstrate that the number of household TVs is positively related to the number of family members in the household. The questionnaire results also show that most families with multiple TVs have a TV in the child's bedroom and these families have fewer TV-related conflicts than do households with only one TV.

We can then assume that some parents buy additional TVs for their children's rooms in order to reduce intra-familial conflict, thereby allowing parents quiet time away from their children. If this assumption is correct, then parental decisions to purchase TVs for a child's bedroom are based on the gratification of parents' needs, the family's needs, as well as the needs of the child who uses the bedroom TV. Inherent in these premises is the specter of "oppositions of interests" or "hostilities", which ultimately determine which of these needs predominates.

Parental attitudes and motives, therefore, affect the way children view their activity needs and choices. This

influence is often structured in such a way as to foreclose participation in many kinds of alternate activity options.

Most parents exercise some degree of control over the amount of television their children watch and the kinds of programs they watch. We saw, for example, that approximately 3/4 of the respondents said that their parents did have TV-related rules. In addition, those parents who view TV with their children (approximately half of the interviewed sample spent some time viewing TV with their parents) also play an active role in determining how children react to TV programs as well as how children interact with other viewing partners. For non-video related activities, we saw that many parents appeared to restrict their children's outside play-time if they felt that the environment was not safe.

These and other types of parental behaviors and attitudes clearly alter, if not constrain, children's behavior. They might also influence whether the child develops a positive or negative attitude toward the restricted activity.

For example, parents who had their own bedroom television were three times more likely to have children who watched alone than were parents with no bedroom TV. Looking at the same data from the child's point of view, children who had and used a bedroom television were, respectively, two and three times more likely to view alone than were children who did not have and did not use a bedroom TV. One assumption that could be made from these findings is that parents are motivated to buy

bedroom TVs for themselves and their children because they want to isolate themselves from their children.

But another motive might also exist. Data in Chapter 8 indicated that children with bedroom TVs felt that they had fewer TV-related disagreements with their parents than did non-owners, so we could also assume that many parents were motivated to buy bedroom TVs for their children in order to reduce family conflict.

Children are sensitive to parents' overt and covert actions. Children might very well ask for bedroom TVs because they sense that their parents really do not want to watch television with them. But parents might wish to purchase these TVs for their children because their children prefer to watch their own shows in the privacy of their own rooms. If the former argument is true, then we can say that a parent's underlying motive for purchasing a TV for their child's bedroom is primarily based on a conflict of interest between children and parents. If the latter argument is true, then the motive can be seen as a parent's desire to help gratify children's social needs. In all probability, both motives operate. Parental decisions to purchase TVs for a child's bedroom are most likely based on the gratification of parents' needs, the family's needs, as well as the needs of the child who uses the bedroom TV and the needs of one party do not always mesh with the needs of others.

In the case of solo TV viewing, both the macro-structural and micro-motivational perspectives of the uses-gratifications approach help explain children's choice of viewing companions. The macro-structural

perspective would suggest that parents, as agents of control, do more to shape a child's decision to watch TV alone than do the child's needs. In other words, many children watch television alone, not so much because they really want to watch alone, but because their parents decide to watch television alone in their own rooms.

Parents also decide what video items to buy for the household, and where these items are placed. These decisions do not always match the wishes of their children. Nonetheless, these decisions effect what and how many activities are available to a child and, consequently, whether children avail themselves of these activities. In addition, as seen in children's comments, they can internalize their parents' attitudes toward video usage. Children often cited their parents' feelings toward television in general, and specific shows in particular, as reasons for their own lack of interest or interest in television.

Even though parents were not interviewed about their reasons for purchasing specific video items, we can infer from children's remarks why parents decide either to buy or not buy other types of video items. Most likely parents buy VCRs primarily for their own use, rather than their children's use, since data showed that parents use VCRs more often than their children do. (A very small percentage of children used VCRs on any given day. In fact, many children were not even allowed to use these machines.) We will see in a later section that for many families, the VCR becomes a focal point for many disputes concerning cassette rentals and tape viewing. Disputes

such as these would tend to discourage parents and children from co-viewing VCR tapes, since most tapes do not usually appeal to both adults and children.

By contrast, computer and video games are used primarily by children, not parents. We can, therefore, assume that the most important motives for buying computers are to please children as well as to help keep children entertained, away from their parents. While these items gratify many needs that are particularly important to children, such as fantasy and escape, they also indirectly gratify parents' needs to have some time away from their children.

Another motive also plays a part in a parent's decision to purchase a computer for their children. Ownership of computers was positively associated with parents' occupational status and positively associated with children's reading ability, even when controlling for occupational status. These findings, while inconclusive, do suggest that many parents are motivated to buy this expensive video item for their children because they believe the computer will improve their child's academic performance. On the other hand, we must accept the strong probability that undetermined parental attitudes associated with computer ownership, rather than computers, contribute to children's high academic achievement.

As noted earlier, the design of this study did not include interviews with parents. Furthermore, most children were not cognizant of the underlying reasons governing their parents' decisions to buy video items. As a result, we could not directly determine why parents

decided to purchase video items for their children. It is probable that manifest motives, such as cost and usefulness and a genuine eagerness to please their children as well as latent motives associated with status attainment and peer pressure influence parents' decisions to buy these video related items. Thus, by determining what uses and gratifications parents derive from various kinds of video media, we can also determine why parents purchase video items for their households and why children engage in video-related activities.

MACRO-STRUCTURAL INFLUENCES ON CHILDREN'S ACTIVITY CHOICES

Macro-structural systems of the child pertain to a broad range of inter-related, non-permanently ascribed, fairly stable demographic factors which appear to influence behavior. This study examined how the child's parents' occupational status, family structure and city of residence affected usage of leisure time.

Parents' Occupational Status

The findings reported in Chapter 3 suggested, in part, that while occupational status (and income) appear to play roles in both a parents' decision to purchase some video items and a child's decision to use the video items, other factors associated with race, ethnicity and city of residence also are related to video ownership and usage (these latter factors will be discussed in subsequent sections). Because occupational status, reading ability and family income are so closely associated with one another, we cannot unequivocally conclude that any one of

these variables, or any combination of variables, is solely responsible for an observed leisure-time activity behavior.

As expected, occupational status (and probably income) were associated with ownership of some video items. In London, the higher status groups were between two and three times more likely to own computers and computer games than were the lower status groups. In New York, the highest-status group was more than twice as likely to own a VCR than was the lowest-status group. However, the economic component of occupational status did not, in and of itself, explain ownership of all video items, since we also found that low-status, low income groups were more likely to own certain kinds of video items than were high-status, high income groups. For example, in New York, the lowest status group had the highest ownership percentage of TVs in the respondents' bedrooms and the lowest status group had almost the same ownership percentage of computers, TVs in parents' rooms and cable TV as did the highest status group. Likewise, in London, the lowest status group had the highest ownership percentage of VCRs, TVs in the respondents' bedrooms, TVs in the parents' bedrooms and multiple numbers of household TVs.

These inconsistent outcomes, whereby some video items were more popular with low occupational status, low income families while other items were more popular with high status, high income families, can be due to several variables which are directly or indirectly associated with occupational status and income. Variables such as the

items cost and other economic considerations, parental attitudes toward children and their education, and parental need for privacy interact with each other in many different ways, influencing a parent's decision to purchase or not purchase any specific video item. Further complicating this decision-making process are culturally related factors such as ethnicity and city of residence. Occupational status and family income, therefore, are only two of several, variables which can impact on a parent's decision to purchase a video item for the family.

Of all the TV related items, ownership of a bedroom television had the most dramatic and consistent effect on children's overall video usage. The data showed that low occupational status parents in both London and New York were somewhat more likely to purchase a television for their children's bedrooms than were high status parents. We also found that children who owned and used these bedroom TVs were nearly twice as likely to watch more than two hours of television than were children who did not own and use bedroom television sets.

While it would, therefore, be logical to expect from these facts that occupational status was also negatively associated with mean television viewing times, in fact, the data in Chapter 4 showed that there was a small positive association between these two variables. It is difficult to reconcile this apparent contradiction, although it is possible that since high-status families [especially in New York] were more likely to own VCRs than were low-status families and since ownership of VCRs was associated with higher TV viewing levels, the high-status

children also tended to have somewhat higher TV viewing levels than did the low-status children.

We also found that bedroom television usage is related to parents' occupational status, children's viewing behavior and familial interactions. Children whose parents had high occupational status were less likely to own and use bedroom TVs, and probably less likely to be solo viewers and more likely to interact with other family members while viewing TV than were children of low status parents. Because of the small sample size, we were not able to directly examine the effects of occupational status on the viewing behavior of children with bedroom television sets.

Many important implications arise from the finding that low-status parents are more likely to purchase TVs for their children's rooms than are high-status parents. For one, there might be different sets of motives and attitudes associated with occupational status which explain why many parents purchase TVs for their children's rooms (as well as other types of video hardware). These same motives and attitudes might also affect children's use of video items, as well as the quantity and quality of family interactions which occur while these items are being used.

Occupational status was more consistently associated with the type of non-video activities children pursued than it was for video item ownership. Children of parents with high occupational status were more likely to attend adult-centered, highly organized activities such as, dance and music lessons and sports groups than were children of

low occupational status parents. The low-status children, conversely, tended to participate in peer-centered, spontaneous activities which took place in the street. We can conjecture that high-status parents had more money to pay for, and more time to escort children to, these kinds of structured activities than did low-status families.

Since each video item and type of non-video activity appears to fulfill complex sets of needs for parents as well as children, we would expect parents to base purchase decisions on whether the items and activities are capable of gratifying all, or most of those needs. Occupational status and income can determine whether some of those needs will be gratified.

Family Structure

Ninety-nine percent of the households in the New York and London samples owned a television, so it is no surprise that television viewing was children's most popular after-school activity. The next most popular video-related activity was computer/video game playing. Fifty-seven percent of all the children owned video games and 32% owned a computer. We assumed that ownership of these and other video items would affect intra-familial interactions. We also assumed that family members would have significant influences on the way children behaved while using these home entertainment items. These expectations were confirmed by the data.

One aspect of family structure, family size, was positively associated with the number of household television sets. But more interestingly, a direct,

positive association existed between the number of household TVs, per capita, and the percentage of children who watched television alone.

This finding is consistent with previously discussed findings showing that most of the families who owned more than one TV had a TV placed in the child's bedroom, and children with bedroom TVs were more likely to watch alone than were children without bedroom TVs.

Family structure also influenced how children participated in many activities, particularly television viewing. As seen in Chapter 8, most children chose to watch television with members of their family. But the manner in which the child viewed television and the conversational topics occurring while children watched television were influenced, in large part, by the age of the person(s) viewing with the child.

For example, when children watched TV with friends or siblings, the conversation usually concerned personal or school matters. When children watched with parents or other adults, the topic was usually confined to the program being watched. From the macro-structural perspective, when dominant family members (in the present case, parents) decide to watch TV with subordinates, namely children, the subordinates appear to defer to their elders by discussing relatively neutral, TV-related issues rather than potentially charged, personal issues.

Television viewing is a multi-faceted activity, since children often do many other activities while the TV set is on. They often talked, played with toys, answered telephones, read and ate while viewing. Most of these

activities occurred within the confines of established family routines related only tangentially to the television set. Yet, without these family routines, the child might not have decided to turn the television on.

These findings point out why it is useful for researchers to examine children's activities within the wider social context of the child's life. In the case of TV viewing, many kinds of social factors influenced children's viewing behavior and viewing partners which, in turn, altered the behavior of the child as well as the functional purposes of the activity itself.

City of Residence

While New York City and London have many common demographic features, there are substantial differences as well. New York families owned significantly more video items than London families. In addition, ecological conditions and school policy with regard to homework in the two cities explain some observed behavioral differences with respect to outdoor play.

Otherwise, New York and London children engaged in similar types of after-school activities and had nearly identical viewing habits. Both groups spent nearly the same amount of time viewing television (New York children averaged 142 minutes of viewing each day as compared to 128 minutes for the London children). However, higher percentages of New York children watched cartoons, sitcoms, and dramatic series than did London children, while higher percentages of London children watched feature films, news/documentaries, and children's programs

than did New York children.

A comparison of the London and New York TV listings showed that in both cities, news/documentaries and children's programs were usually broadcast in the late afternoon and early evening. However, in New York, cartoons were frequently aired opposite news/documentaries and children's programs while in London, this competition for children's attention did not exist. Consequently, news/documentaries and children's programming received higher viewership ratings in London than they did in New York.

video hardware ownership

Interesting and consistent differences which emerged from the New York and London data were in the video hardware and software ownership figures. With the exception of VCRs, New York families were much more likely to own each video item than were London families. Nearly twice as many New York children owned video games than did London children and four times as many New York children and nearly three times as many of their parents had TVs in their bedrooms than did, respectively, London children and parents. The average New York family owned 2.65 TVs as compared to only 1.81 TVs for the average London family. Computers had the smallest ownership differences, with 11% more New Yorkers owning this item than did Londoners.

We assumed that median income variations accounted for these differences, until we observed that half of both the New Yorkers and Londoners owned VCRs. If the supposed higher standard of living of New Yorkers was the only

factor accounting for the higher New York ownership figures, then why would nearly identical percentages of both cultural groups own relatively expensive VCRs? Why would much higher percentages of the lowest status London groups own VCRs than the highest status groups? And why, especially, would Non-English speakers in London have the highest VCR ownership figures while the New York Hispanics have the lowest figures?

The only way to answer the first two questions would be to interview parents about their attitudes towards video item ownership. Because we were not able to do so, we can only assume that New Yorkers have more positive attitudes towards video items than do their London counterparts; we cannot state why these attitudes are different.

The third question can be examined by looking at the availability of foreign language programming in the two cities. Macro-structural factors (particularly the actions of those agents who control the airwaves) interact with micro-motivational factors (people's need to be entertained in their native language) which, in turn, affect decisions to purchase VCRs.

London television does not provide much, if any, non-English programming, but in New York, two UHF Spanish language channels broadcast continuously each day. It is quite likely that London Non-English speakers rely heavily on VCRs for foreign language tapes. The same can be said for the New York non-English speakers. New York Hispanics, on the other hand, do not need to buy VCRs because they have access to programming in their native

language. VCRs fulfill specific needs for specific ethnic groups. When the bodies that regulate the air waves encourage foreign language programming, the need for VCRs appear to decline.

Video item ownership figures helped explain why London children were more likely to view television with, and converse with their parents and siblings than were New York children. The data showed that London children were twice as likely to do all their viewing with parents and siblings and, therefore, more likely to interact with family members than were New York children. Conversely, New York children were more than twice as likely to view alone for part of the day and not interact with anyone during the viewing hours than were London children.

These parent-child interaction differences can probably be explained by the fact that the number of household TVs was found to be inversely related to the frequency of parent-child interactions during the viewing hours. Since New York families owned many more TVs than London families and were also more likely to have a TV in a child's and parent's bedroom, New York children were also more likely to view TV alone than were London children.

We were not able to delve further into the reasons for this wide variation in television ownership between New York and London families. Economic factors might just as easily account for these different ownership figures as would negative parental attitudes towards television.

ecological conditions and outdoor play

The London neighborhoods chosen for this study had low rise, Victorian houses on quiet, tree-lined streets. Shops and parks were situated near children's houses. These three elements formed a safe and harmonious environment conducive to children's outdoor activities. The high level of street traffic, the close visual contact between child, home and caretaker all seemed to contribute to the child's sense of security which, in turn, encouraged children to venture out onto the street with their peers.

The New York neighborhoods, in contrast to the London neighborhoods, were largely composed of either high rise apartment complexes with sparsely trafficked streets far removed from the children's apartments and parents or single family homes that were surrounded by high hedges and trees insulating homes from the lightly trafficked streets. Many New York children cited their parents' or their own perception of street danger as a major reason for their not going outside to play, even though official crime figures showed that their neighborhoods were, in fact, fairly safe.

The London neighborhoods appear to have provided children with conditions supporting spontaneous, peer-centered play environments; ecological conditions in New York neighborhoods seemed to deter children's outdoor play activities.

Another variable associated with outdoor play time was homework. Those London children who did homework were less likely to play outdoors than were children who did

not do homework. In New York, there were virtually no differences between the children who did homework and those who did not. The data do not conclusively prove that homework prevents children from playing outdoors since nearly all New York children received homework while nearly all Londoners did not, so we were not able to explain how homework affected playtime within each sample. However, a daily chore like homework most likely reduces the amount of time children have for many discretionary activities, including playtime.

Comparative studies often cite cultural differences as explanations for behavior variations. Cultural variations are often products of the society's institutions and the economic and ecological environment within which those institutions operate. This study has shown that children's psychological and social needs do not differ all that much. Where differences were observed, environmental and institutional factors appeared to be logical causes of these differences rather than deeply ingrained characteristics associated with the values and norms of each child's society.

MACRO-STRUCTURAL AND MICRO-MOTIVATIONAL ELEMENTS

Child developmentalists, such as Erikson and Piaget, assume that all children pass through critical stages of physical, psychological, and emotional development as they mature. Inherent in their concept of stages is the premise that society, represented by family, school, and physical environment, plays a great role in helping children negotiate their way through the various stages of

life. Therefore, there is a complex interplay between the micro-motivational sphere (psychological and physical characteristics common to all children) and the macro-structural sphere (environmental factors) which can differ from child to child and culture to culture.

This study isolated several factors that can affect the way a child views himself and his world: race and ethnicity, gender, academic achievement (as operationalized by reading ability), and peer group affiliation. Each of these variables can have varying effects on a child's self-esteem, leisure interests and social relations within the school and family.

This study found statistically significant associations between parts of a child's psycho-social system and environment and the way children participate in many types of leisure activities:

- . Black children were much less likely to play outdoors and much more likely to be high TV viewers than were all other racial and ethnic groups.

- . Girls were much less likely to play outdoors, play with computer/video games, and watch cartoons than were boys. Parents were much less likely to purchase computers and video/computer games for girls than for boys.

- . Good readers were somewhat less likely to watch TV than were poor readers and more likely to own computers.

- . Children tended to engage in the same kinds of activities as did other children in their peer groups.

If specific activities do, in fact, gratify specific psycho-social needs of children, then apparently some children, simply because of their race, ethnicity, gender,

academic ability and/or peer group affiliation either do not have access to or do not choose to engage in some worthwhile activities.

Ethnicity and Race

Ethnicity and race were strongly associated with children's choice of video and non-video activities, particularly TV program preferences and outdoor playtime. But these behavioral patterns are as much reflections of a society's attitudes as they are reflections of the cultural values of ethnic and racial groups.

Quite significant differences in both video and non-video activities were found between Black children and children in all other ethnic groups. Black children were much less likely to play outdoors and more likely to spend more time watching television than were children in all other ethnic groups. In addition, Blacks tended to watch higher levels of escapist programs, such as sitcoms and drama series, than did Whites. These findings tend to confirm prior research findings; yet, as with these other studies, no conclusive evidence exists to explain convincingly why these viewing differences occur.

However, the present study can offer some insight into why Blacks tended to watch more TV than Whites. Of those interviewed, only 17% of the New York sample and 7% of the London sample were Black. Given the state of racial relations, it is reasonable to believe that many Blacks did not develop close friendships with White and Asian children. In addition, because there were so few Blacks in each school and class, Black children might not

have had many opportunities to develop ties with other Blacks as well. These findings and assumptions lead us to believe that Black children might have spent more time at home than White children because they were socially isolated from their White peers. Since they were at home for longer periods of time than White children, they also had more opportunity to view TV than Whites.

It is also possible that socially isolated children develop a different set of perceived needs than do socially integrated children. In the case of Black children, we can assume that because the samples' Blacks probably did not have the network of friends that Whites had, they might not even want to consider outdoor play as a viable option.

Social isolation hypotheses could also account for Black-White program viewing preferences. We found some support for the theory that peer pressure affects the types of programs children watch. If Black and White children do not interact with each other, then we would expect Black children's viewing preferences to be different from the White children, and so they were.

The uses-gratifications approach cannot explain why Black children were more prone to have high levels of TV viewing and less prone to play outdoors than were Whites. This perspective might, in fact, mislead us into believing that higher percentages of Black children prefer TV viewing to outdoor play than do Whites.

In this instance, the macro-structural perspective of the uses-gratifications approach helps explain these viewing preferences since it focuses on the underlying

causes for these behaviors i.e., racial prejudice which excludes Blacks from social activities would draw children into socially and psychologically gratifying activities (especially TV viewing) within the home.

Gender

Gender differences were highly associated with children's activities. In New York, significantly fewer girls played outdoors and watched cartoons than did boys. In both cities, computers and video/computer games were much more likely to be found in families where all the children were boys than in families where all the children were girls. Significantly fewer girls used computer/video games than did boys.

In London, nearly equal percentages of boys and girls played outdoors, while in New York, boys were nearly three times as likely to play outdoors than were girls. Safety issues were mentioned by a large number of New Yorkers as reasons for not playing outdoors, but these issues were hardly ever mentioned by Londoners, probably because the London neighborhoods seemed to afford a greater amount of security to children than did the communities in New York. Because parents often are more protective of girls than boys, New York girls would be less inclined to play outdoors than would boys.

With the exception of cartoon programs, we found virtually no differences between boys' and girls' television program preferences. Controlling for residency, we found that in London, boys and girls were equally likely to watch cartoons while in New York,

between two-thirds and twice as many boys were likely to watch cartoons as were girls. The probable cause of these gender-residency differences seems to be the violent content of the cartoons aired in New York, as contrasted with the non-violent cartoons aired in London. Since the only discernible difference between London and New York cartoons was the level of violence, we assume that the New York girls were not as satisfied by the fast-moving, aggressive content as much as the boys and, therefore, did not watch as many cartoons as the boys.

The inferences drawn from cartoon viewing patterns are applicable to computer playing even though cartoon shows are equally accessible to boys and girls while computers and related software apparently are not. Comparing families with only boys to families with only girls, 24% more "boys-only" families had video/computer games and 21% more computers than "girls-only" families. While it is possible that girls do not ask parents to purchase these items as often as boys, it is also possible that parents view computers and video games as genderized, "male appropriate" activities and, consequently, are more likely to encourage their sons to ask for these items than their daughters.

Not surprisingly, we also found that in both London and New York, twice as many boys used their video games on the day preceding their interview than did girls. The girls' lack of enthusiasm for video games may be attributed to the violent and aggressive themes of these games as well as parents' subtle messages which discourage girls from using computers and related games.

We speculated that because the software producers are predominantly male, they create what appeals to themselves. Because boys become more interested in, and more adept at using computers than are girls, males will probably be more likely to enter the computer industry than will females. We might now be witnessing the beginning of a professional and economic gender gap in the computer industry. Further research must address these crucial issues in order to help the current generation of female students develop computer related interests and skills.

We also found that young girls are less likely to participate in outdoor activities that are perceived as being unsafe or engage in video activities with violent and aggressive themes than are boys. While this study did not explore this issue, reason for these behavior differences most probably lies with socialization methods: Girls are taught from an early age, both at school and at home, not to be as assertive as boys. Girls, consequently, would want to play in safer surroundings, watch more introspective TV programs and be more likely to shun violent video games, than would boys.

Gender explains a great many differences in leisure-time activity choices. But beneath the differences may lie much more salient issues only incidentally related to gender. These differences can best be understood within the framework of the macro-structural component of the uses-gratifications approach. Schools and parents, abetted by software companies, impart gender-based attitudes to girls and boys which dysfunctionally limit

alternatives for girls. Consequently, many kinds of social and economic inequities are certain to occur.

Reading Ability

Because reading ability is highly correlated with parents' occupational status, as well as a host of other socio-economic indicators, it is difficult, if not impossible, to determine whether reading ability or some other related variable is the cause of many observed behaviors. For example, when we controlled for occupational status, we saw that good readers were more likely to own computers than were poor readers, at each occupational status level. But, we could not determine if high reading grades encouraged parents to buy computers for their children or if unidentified attitudes associated with computer ownership caused children to have higher grades than non-owners. This study could not isolate which of these factors most influenced high reading levels, but it would be worthwhile to examine, in greater detail, the motives of parents who decide to buy computers for their children in order to understand how these motives translate into high reading grades.

There seemed to be virtually no relationship between reading ability and the amount of television viewing, either in New York or in London (after we adjusted the figures for VCR ownership in London). It is fairly safe to say that high levels of television usage do not appear to adversely affect reading ability.

But we also found that if a child does homework while viewing TV, the child's grades probably suffer. Children

who usually do homework while watching TV have lower reading grades than children who hardly ever do homework and watch TV at the same time.

In terms of children's preferences for types of programs, we did not find many significant associations, although below-average New York readers were more apt to view sitcoms, cartoons and dramatic series than were above average-readers. Good readers were just as likely to view most other types of programs, as were poor readers.

When we found non-significant viewing differences for specific program categories, higher percentages of the poor readers were watching programs in these categories as compared with the good readers, leading us to cautiously infer that watching high levels of some types of television programs can interfere with a child's academic performance.

We must also consider the possibility that other factors associated with reading ability were influencing some poor readers to watch high levels of television. For example, we found that children who read on any given day are nearly twice as likely to be light TV viewers as are children who do not read, suggesting that poor readers are inclined to substitute television viewing for reading while good readers are inclined to read rather than watch TV.

If this inference is correct, then we might conclude that viewing of specific television programs does not necessarily cause low reading scores. Rather, lack of reading skills could discourage some children from reading which would, in turn, provide children with additional

time for television viewing. Reading ability might not be as important a determinant of a child's television viewing behavior as desire to read, even though interest in reading and reading ability are linked to each other.

Peer Group Affiliations

Rubin (1985:197) contends that "age is a viable descriptor of attitudes and behavior, partly because an age cohort can tell us something about the role of individual and social factors in the life cycle." Interview responses suggested that many children were inclined to choose specific TV programs or engage in various activities, like going to video arcades or playing outdoors, primarily because peers engaged in these activities and children wanted to be a part of their peers' culture.

Since peer ties often develop within school classes, it is not surprising to find that TV program viewing preferences were more likely to vary with the school class of the child than with other demographic variables, such as ethnicity and race. Peer influences also play important roles in how children select non-home based activities. We saw, for example, that children attended video arcades as much for the joy of playing the games as for the joy of being alone with their friends.

Much higher percentages of New York and London children engaged in peer-centered activities than in adult-centered activities. It was very interesting that while some children engaged in adult organized and led activities such as dance classes and music lessons

(particularly in the New York upper-middle class community), many more children played, unsupervised, with their friends. It is possible that more children would have participated in these types of organized activities if they were made available to them. However, very few of the London and New York children joined after-school centers, even though they were available to most of the youngsters.

Many of the findings in this study suggest that most children liked to engage in solo activities or played with their friends and siblings in peer-centered and peer-developed group activities which they themselves organized. They preferred not to use their limited amount of leisure time doing what grown-ups thought they would (or should) enjoy doing.

Both a micro-motivational and macro-structural perspective of the uses-gratifications approach could account for children's preferences for peer-centered activities. From the micro-motivational view, these types of activities offer intrinsic gratification for many kinds social and psychological needs. From the macro-structural view, such activities might reflect antipathy towards, and rejection of, activities which are organized and led by adults. As such, participation in peer-centered activities could really be serving as a catalyst for the gratification of some displaced needs.

Examining activity behaviors from both micro-motivational and macro-structural perspectives can, consequently, raise many questions about children's decision-making processes, particularly with regard to

outside influences on their choices of activities. Integrating both macro-structural and micro-motivational perspectives can also be useful in explaining how a child's motives for engaging in an activity can affect that activities potential to gratify needs.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This is one of the first studies to describe and analyze how a narrowly defined age group of nine-to-eleven year old children use computers, VCRs, and video games. It is also the only study to compare video ownership and usage patterns for New York and London children. Blumler et al.(1985:268) point out the efficacy of cross-cultural media studies, such as this one, because they "distinguish many features of audience-media (and non-media) relationships that transcend national boundaries from those that are country-specific." In addition, they enable us to contrast video behavior under different sets of naturally occurring environmental and social conditions.

This research has confirmed what parents and teachers already suspected: Children spend a fair amount of time and energy watching television. But it has also shown that parental attitudes and behaviors, environmental factors and social characteristics of children and their parents account for a great part of the variation of children's video and video related behavior.

Some TV programming and video software might very well be harmful to children. Many children might be spending too much time in front of video screens. And parents might have little influence over programming

decisions. But parents can control the familial conditions within which these and other activities occur.

The data in this study has repeatedly demonstrated that while most parents attempt to exercise control over their children's viewing, they purposefully create home environments which discourage children-parent interactions and encourage exactly the kinds of viewing habits that they purportedly want to extinguish.

If our primary goal is to provide children with appropriate psychological, cognitive and social experiences, then we will have to develop educationally appropriate, sensitive and non-violent programming that would also be attractive to children. However, providing these types of programming would probably not alter the amount of time children spend watching television and playing video games.

If our aim is to encourage children to spend more time doing non-video activities, then our energies would be better spent focusing on the myriad of factors which do or do not bring the child in front of the TV. Both goals are equally important but the latter goal is not always emphasized.

CHAPTER NOTES

NOTES FOR CHAPTER TWO

1. Some schools in London and New York would not permit this researcher to directly ask children to identify their racial or ethnic background. However, I was allowed to ask the interviewed children if their parents speak another language, besides English, at home. Those children who said that their parent(s) did speak another language, besides English, were coded into one of five ethnic/racial categories:

- 1) White-English speaking
- 2) Black-English speaking
- 3) Hispanic-American
- 4) Other Non-English speaking
- 5) Black, Non-English speaking

In addition, for any non-interviewed respondent, Hispanic and Asian surnamed children were coded into either category 3 or 4, respectively.

If the child indicated that only one parent was able to speak a foreign language, then the child was coded into that ethnic category. Black-Hispanic children were coded into the Hispanic category, since it was felt that ethnic differences would explain a much greater part of the variance of media usage than would racial differences.

2. Statistics of London's Ethnic Minorities 1979 and 1981 Statistical Series: Number 40, Table 35, Page 96.
 Publisher: Greater London Council, 1986.

3. Parents occupational status was determined by estimating the type of skills parents needed to perform their job and the general level of education of most people with that job description. Because there is a high, but not perfect, correlation between income, educational attainment and occupational status, occupational status can be thought of as a rough estimate of the respondents' socio-economic status.

Coding job descriptions into one of four occupational status categories was not always easy, and this researcher might be faulted for some coding decisions, since decisions were necessarily somewhat subjective. However, another sociologist was asked to code some occupations independently of this researcher. Very few disagreements actually emerged from these coding sessions. If both parents worked, then the respondent was assigned the highest of the two statuses.

The interviewer asked the children to describe their parent's jobs. As expected, most children had a fairly good idea about the general kind of work their parents performed, but a great many children were unable to describe details of their parents' jobs or their parents' level of education. When necessary, some London teachers and headteachers were able to provide more detailed information about the respondents' parents' occupations.

Occupational data could not be obtained for the 50 students attending Freetowns School in London. The school is situated in an upper middle class area, and nearly all

the children walked to school. The teachers and headteacher characterized the students as upper middle class. We would be committing an ecological fallacy, however, if we assumed that all the parents in these 50 cases were in fact "white collar" workers simply because the students lived in a widely regarded upper middle class neighborhood.

The figures in Table 2.2 treat these 50 students as "missing data"; however, an argument could be made to collapse the two white collar categories and include these "missing" cases in this newly created, white-collar, category. If this procedure were followed, this "white collar" category would include nearly 70% of the sample and the possible variance would be artificially reduced. As a result, unless otherwise stated, the variable, "occupational status", will not include cases with missing data.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER THREE

1. Regional Trends 20, Table 8.4: Percentage Distribution of Households By Household Income-1982-1983. Central Statistical Office G.B.:Government Statistical Service-1985 edition.

2. County and City Data Book-1983, 10th Edition, Table D: Places, Area, Population, Income and Housing.U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census.

3. The New York Times of November 12, 1984, quotes Frank McCann, vice president of the RCA Corporation's consumer electronics division, as saying that "one out of seven homes has a VCR now; it's no longer a novelty for the affluent or the videophile." The 1983 British Parliamentary Group Video Enquiry, Video Violence and children, estimates that 40.9% of the children in that study have a VCR in their homes, as compared with 30.1% for the national average. The present study shows that approximately 50% of both the New York and London samples own VCRs.

4. Bezzini, John J. and Desmond, Roger J., "Adoption Processes of Cable Television", Paper presented at the International Communication Association, Dallas, Texas, May, 1983.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER FOUR

1. In New York, 34 respondents (15% of the total N) indicated that they did not view TV. In London, 80 respondents (45% of the total N) claimed not to have seen TV. Many of these "non-viewers" indicated in a previous question that they had watched TV the night before but then did not list the names of the shows they saw. Some respondents changed a "YES" answer to this previous question to a "NO" answer. Could this change of mind be an indication of test fatigue or frustration? In any case, the number of "non-viewers" appears to be quite high, especially when contrasting these figures with the 8% and 7% "non-viewer" figures for the interviews in New York and London, respectively. These means, therefore, are indications of average viewing time only of the children who claimed to have watched television, rather than mean viewing times of the entire sample.

2. Schramm, W., Lyle, J. and Parker, E. Television in the Lives of Our Children, (Stanford University Press, 1961), P. 213.

3. There were no New York "Sunday interviewees" who also used their VCRs on Sunday, even though 30% of these respondents owned VCRs. As a result, the New York television viewing times and combined television and VCR viewing times are identical.

4. The New York figures should be accepted with some degree of caution since the mean of non-users includes one deviant case of 1290 minutes of viewing. If this case were excluded, the mean would drop to 150 minutes.

5. In interpreting this table, several points concerning the data collection must be considered:

A- Approximately 8% of the New York students and 7% of the London viewers typically do not watch television on any given day. The percentages of each sample who viewed each program category as well as the mean minutes are based upon the total sample Ns, including these non-viewers.

B- This researcher was not able to personally view all the programs aired each day, but he did have access to newspaper and magazine TV listings which often provided enough information concerning program content to make reasonably accurate coding judgements. Nevertheless, there is a possibility that some programs might not have been coded properly. The greatest probability of coding errors will most likely appear with the cartoon and children's TV categories since some children's programs are also cartoon shows. Where the focus and aim of a cartoon program was deemed to be primarily educational, then it was coded as a children's program rather than as a cartoon.

C- These figures do not include VCR viewing. As was discussed in a previous part of this chapter, most children use their VCRs to view feature films.

6. Between 3:30 and 11:00 on the day preceding each sample's questionnaire, 34% of the New York VHF broadcast air time was devoted to news and documentaries, 19% for dramatic series, 14% for situation comedies, 11% for variety/music videos, 6% each for feature films and children's programs, 8% for cartoons and 2% for sports.

In London, the percentage distributions were 39% for news and documentaries, 7% for sitcoms, 9% for variety/music videos, 4% for feature films, 15% for children's programs, 4% for cartoons and 4% for sports.

7. The data in Table 4.9 are derived from a questionnaire item which asked children to list all the television programs watched on the preceeding day. No specific definition of "television watching" was given to the children, and children were not asked to indicate whether they watched the entire program. We will, therefore, assume that children did indeed watch each listed program in its entirety. Means and standard deviations are based on this assumption.

The percentages for each program category are based on the number of children in each class/school who watched any amount of television during the preceeding day rather than the total number of children who responded to the questionnaire. This formula for computing percentages was selected because of the fairly large number of children who did not answer the question, and the deflated figures which would have occurred, if these missing figures had been included in the computations.

Unfortunately, scheduling constraints, particularly in London, precluded the possibility of giving the children as much time as many of them might have needed to accurately complete this question. Some children in London's Hortaine and Mineplain Schools indicated in a previous question that they had seen television the day before but subsequently did not list any program watched. It must be mentioned that the Hortaine School teacher promised the children to let them go outside to play "as soon as they finished the questionnaire", so we can assume that many of these "no responses" were more indicative of the student's eagerness to play than the student's actual prior day television activities. An inordinately high percentage of London children (35%) said that they did not watch television the night before, even though the later interviews showed that only 7% of the respondents did not watch TV on any given day.

The questionnaire was much more carefully administered in New York than in London, and this extra care is reflected in the much higher response rate to this question (10% of the New York sample indicated that they did not watch TV during the prior day while 87% of the sample in fact listed at least one TV program that they watched. Six percent of the interviewed students indicated that they did not watch television on the previous day; almost the same percentage as the London sample.

8. Even though there were only six Blacks in the London sample, the percentage differences for the Black and White-English speakers and Black and Other, Non-English speakers are fairly similar to corresponding New York figures. This similarity should provide us with a reasonable degree of confidence in this sub-tables data, in spite of the very small number of Blacks in the London sample.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER FIVE

1. Socio-economic areas rather than parents' occupational status are being used here because we were not able to obtain parents' occupational status from the children in Freetown's School, which was located in the highest socio-economic status area in the London sample. Even though we run the risk of committing an ecological fallacy, we are assuming, for this part of the analysis only, that all the Freetowns children's parents had high occupational status because of the school's location.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER SIX

1. Video Violence and Children, Report of a Parliamentary Group Video Enquiry, 1984.

2. Learning In New York, New York State Education Department, June, 1986.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER SEVEN

1. While children did not seem to have too much trouble estimating the amount of time they devoted to homework, they did have much more difficulty estimating the amount of time they devoted to other, non-video activities. It is conceivable that since homework is a home-centered activity generally starting and ending at the same time each day, most children are capable of estimating the length of time for completion of this activity. The other non-video activities listed in Appendix 10 and Table 7.1 are less formal, less home-centered, and much less structured activities than homework. These activities can be and are usually performed in irregular, disjointed time periods. Children had so much difficulty remembering how much time they spent doing these other non-video activities, and the estimates of those children who ventured making such guesses were deemed to be so inaccurate, that children were simply not asked to estimate the time devoted to these activities.

This data deficiency does limit the kinds of analyses which can be performed, particularly with respect to whether non-video activities actually displace television viewing, since we do not know the length of time children spent pursuing most non-video activities. However, we do know if children did or did not engage in specific non-video activities. On the basis of this data, we should

still be able to produce fairly valid and reliable analyses with regard to media displacement by non-video activities.

2. Many New York children who did not do homework had been absent from school on the previous day and might very well have been sick. If so, then we can assume that illness prevented these children from going outside to play rather than any factors associated with the act of not getting homework; that is, it is likely that if many of these non-homework doers had been healthy, they would have opted to go outside to play with friends. If so, then we would have probably obtained a stronger, negative association between getting homework and playing outdoors.

3. We must also remember that 57% of the London children who did homework were enrolled in the Freetown's School. As a result, there might very well be unidentified variables other than those which are related to homework, such as social class and/or environmental factors, which could constitute major influences on these students' decisions not to play outdoors.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER EIGHT

1. Children who did not answer this question were coded as "missing".

APPENDIX 1SELF-ADMINISTERED QUESTIONNAIRE-NEW YORK

- 1) How many people live with you in your house?_____
- 2) How many OLDER BROTHERS are living at home with you?__
- 3) How many OLDER SISTERS are living at home with you?__
- 4) How many YOUNGER BROTHERS are living at home with you?
- 5) How many YOUNGER SISTERS are living at home with you?_
- 6) How many WORKING televisions do you have in your house?
- 7) Do you have any kind of TV listing such as a TV Guide
in your house? A) YES_____ B) NO_____

If you checked YES, answer the next question:

- 8) How often do you use this TV listing?
A) Hardly ever___ B) Some days___ C) Almost always___
- 9) How often do you watch TV with EACH of the following
people?

	HARDLY EVER	SOME DAYS	ALMOST ALWAYS
Older brothers	_____	_____	_____
Older sisters	_____	_____	_____
Younger brothers	_____	_____	_____
Younger sisters	_____	_____	_____
Mother	_____	_____	_____
Father	_____	_____	_____
Friends	_____	_____	_____

- 10) How often do you watch TV alone?
A) Hardly ever___ B) Sometimes___ C) Almost always___

- 11) How often do you have disagreements about which TV
program to watch with each of the following people in
your family?

	HARDLY EVER	SOME DAYS	ALMOST ALWAYS
Older brothers	_____	_____	_____
Older sisters	_____	_____	_____
Younger brothers	_____	_____	_____
Younger sisters	_____	_____	_____
Mother and/or Father	_____	_____	_____

- 12) Which of the choices below best describes how your disagreements are usually solved? (Choose only one.)
 A) Your parents decide what will be watched.
 B) Your OLDER brothers and/or OLDER sisters decide what to watch.
 C) Your YOUNGER brothers and/or YOUNGER sisters decide what to watch.
 D) YOU decide what to watch.
 E) Other possibility not listed.
- 13) How often do you discuss with your parents the TV programs you watch?
 A) Hardly ever B) Sometimes C) Almost always
- 14) How often do you do your homework while you are watching TV?
 A) Hardly ever B) Sometimes C) Almost always
- 15) How often is the TV set on while your family is eating dinner?
 A) Hardly ever C) Sometimes C) Almost always
- 16) About how many hours do you usually watch TV on SCHOOL DAYS?
 _____ HOURS
- 17) Have you ever lost the use of your TV as part of a punishment?
 A) Yes B) No
 If you checked YES, answer the next question:
- 18) How many times did you receive this kind of punishment during the last 4 weeks? _____
- 19) Indicate below how often you did the following activities during the last 7 DAYS?

	HARDLY EVER	SOME TIMES	VERY OFTEN
A) Reading at home	_____	_____	_____
B) Playing games at home	_____	_____	_____
C) Meeting friends away from your house	_____	_____	_____
D) Talking to family members	_____	_____	_____
E) Listening to Music	_____	_____	_____

- 20) Does your family own a video cassette recorder (VCR)?
 A) Yes B) No
 If you checked YES, answer the following 2 questions:
- 21) How many TV programs do YOU usually tape each week?
 A) None B) 1-3 programs C) 4 or more

- 22) How often does your family rent video films which can be shown on your TV?
A) Hardly ever_____ B) Sometimes_____ C) Fairly often_____
- 23) How much time do you usually spend reading (after school) each day?
A) Less than 15 minutes?_____
B) Between 15-30 minutes?_____
C) Between 30 minutes-1 hour?_____
D) More than 1 hour? _____
- 24) Do you usually read while you are watching TV?
A) Yes_____ B) No_____
- 25) What time do you usually go to bed on:
A) School nights?_____
B) Saturday nights?_____
- 26) How often do you have trouble falling asleep at night because another family member has the TV on too loud?
A) Hardly ever_____ B) Sometimes_____ C) Very often_____
- 27) How many rooms are there in your house or apartment?
_____rooms
- 28) Make a list of all the rooms in your house or apartment which have a TV set.
- 29) Which room in your house do YOU usually watch TV?

- 30) Which room in your house do your parents usually watch TV?_____
- 31) Which room in your house do your brothers/sisters usually watch TV?_____
- 32) Do your parents have rules about how and when you can watch TV?
A) Yes_____ B) No_____
- If you checked YES, briefly describe what these rules are:
- 33) Are there some TV programs that your parents don't let you watch?
A) Yes_____ B) No_____

- 34) Do you have video games or computer games in your home?
A) Yes _____ B) No _____
If you checked YES, answer the following 3 questions:
- 35) About how much time do you usually play these video games on SCHOOL DAYS?
A) Less than 1 hr. _____
B) Between 1-2 hrs. _____
C) More than 2 hrs. _____
- 36) About how much time do you usually play these video games on SATURDAYS?
A) Less than 1 hr. _____
B) Between 1-2 hrs. _____
C) More than 2 hrs. _____
- 37) I usually play with my video games: (Make only 1 check mark)
A) Alone _____
B) With my parents _____
C) With my brothers and/or sisters _____
D) With my friends _____
E) With another person not on this list _____
- 38) Is an adult usually at home when you come home from school?
A) Yes _____ B) No _____
If you checked YES, answer the following question:
- 39) Which person is most often at home when you come home from school?
A) Only your mother _____
B) Only your father _____
C) BOTH your mother and your father _____
D) A grandparent _____
E) A neighbor _____
F) Another person not listed here _____
- 40) Do you have cable television at home?
A) Yes _____ B) No _____
- 41) Do you have a computer at home?
A) Yes _____ B) No _____
- 42) Did you watch television Yesterday?
A) Yes _____ B) No _____
If you checked YES, make a list of all the television programs you watched YESTERDAY.
- 43) If you have a VCR at home, make a list of all the tapes you saw YESTERDAY.

APPENDIX 2
INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1) I'm going to ask you to try to remember all the things you did yesterday from the time you came home from school.

A) When children mention TV use:

1-Who did you watch with?

2-What activities were you doing while you were watching?

3-Were there any interruptions while you were watching? What kind of interruptions were they?

4-Did you talk to anyone during the programs? What did you talk about? Same questions for A.M. television viewing.

2) Do you have a VCR?

A) How many tapes do you have at home?

B) Are there any tapes that you have not seen yet? When do you usually see the tapes you make?

C) What kind of programs do you usually tape?

D) Are you allowed to use the VCR by yourself? Why not?

E) What are your favorite tapes? How many times have you seen these favorite tapes?

F) Do your parents rent video films? How often? What kinds of films do they usually rent? Do they rent films for you? How do they know what films you want to see?

3) Do you ever watch horror films? Who do you watch these films with? or Why don't you watch horror films?

4) Have you ever been to a video arcade? How much money did you spend the last time you went to one? Why don't you go to arcades more often? Why do you like going to

arcades?

5) Can you remember a time when you wanted to see a TV program but your parents wouldn't let you? Tell me what happened. Are there any programs you are not allowed to watch? Why aren't you allowed to watch these programs?

6) How much homework did you have last night?

7) Do your parents speak another language at home? Can you speak that language as well?

8) Do you have a computer at home? Computer games? Video games like Atari? How many games do you have? How often did you play with these games yesterday? During the past week? Who did you use them with? or How come you don't play with these games more often?

9) What kind of work does your father do?

10) What kind of work does your mother do?

APPENDIX 3
CONSENT LETTER TO PARENTS

Date

Dear Parents:

Teachers and parents are often worried about the effects of television and video games on their children's work and social development. In order to better understand these effects, I would like to administer a group questionnaire to your child's class. The questionnaire will ask the children to answer general questions about their use of television and video games and how TV is used by their families. I will also randomly select a small number of children for a 20 minute interview on this same subject.

The children's answers will be completely confidential and no one from the school will see the completed questionnaires. The replies will be statistically combined with those of children from other schools taking part in this study.

I do hope that you will allow your child to participate in this project. Their participation will help schools learn more about how to use the benefits which TV can provide for children and reduce some of the negative consequences associated with TV viewing. If you are willing to give your consent, please sign the form below and return it to school tomorrow. I thank you very much for your cooperation.

Very sincerely,

Seth P. Welins

My child, _____, has permission to participate
 child's name
in this study of television viewing and video game playing
behavior.

Signature

APPENDIX 4INITIAL INTRODUCTION TO STUDENTS IN LONDON AND NEW YORK

My name is Mr. Welins. I am a teacher in New York City, and I've come to London (your school) for a very special reason. I'm trying to learn more about young people and television watching.

I will be visiting your school and four other schools in London (and several other schools) sometime next week. At that time, I will ask some questions about your television watching.

I will give each of you a letter to take home to your parents. In order to take part in this project, you must get one of your parents to sign the bottom of this letter, and you must return it to school no later than this Wednesday.

I hope you will all take good care of these letters, and remember to put them in a safe place when you leave school today.

I think you will enjoy being a part of this project, and I am looking forward to seeing you all again.

APPENDIX 5
GROUP QUESTIONNAIRE INSTRUCTIONS

Today you will be answering some questions about your television watching. When you get your questionnaire (hold up a questionnaire), put it on your desk and wait for me to tell you what to do next.

Distribute questionnaires

- 1) I will read each question to you. Silently read along with me, and put a check (tick mark) or a word in the space next to each question.
- 2) Try to answer each question as carefully as you can, even if some questions might be a bit hard. Remember, this is not a test, and there are no wrong or right answers. Just try to answer the questions as carefully as you can.
- 3) If you do have a question, raise your hand, and I will try to help you.
- 4) No one at this school will be able to see your answers or identify your work. As you can see, your names are not on these papers.
- 5) I hope you enjoy answering these questions. And thank you for listening so hard and being so well-behaved.

APPENDIX 6INSTRUCTIONS TO STUDENTS-INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS

I was very pleased with the work that you did for me last week, but there is still a bit more information about your television watching which I would like to have. Instead of giving you another questionnaire to fill out, I will speak with you one at a time.

I will be in Room _____. Someone from your class will give you a pass. You then should come directly to my room. I'll be speaking with each of you for only about 15 minutes.

The questions will be very similar to the questions I asked you last week, but if I should ask you a question that you don't feel comfortable with, then just let me know. I don't think this will happen, but if it does, you don't have to answer.

One last thing. I would appreciate your not talking about these interviews until I get a chance to finish speaking with all your classmates.

APPENDIX 7NOTES ON HOW TELEVISION AND VCR VIEWING TIMES WERE COMPILED

Children's Self-Reported Estimates-Questionnaire

Additional verbal instructions were given to each class after question 5 was read. These instructions asked the children to try to remember how much TV they usually watch between the time they come home from school and the time they usually go to bed. They were also reminded not to include the time they usually spend playing outside with friends or doing other non-TV activities. Children were also asked to exclude the time they usually watch TV in the morning. Since many studies have shown that people tend to over-estimate the amount of time they watch TV, these figures should be accepted rather cautiously.

Children's Self-Reported List of Television and VCR
ProgramsQuestionnaire

Children were first asked if they saw TV the previous day. Those who checked "YES" were asked to list all the TV programs they watched during the previous afternoon and evening. They then were asked to list all the VCR tapes they watched. (The question concerning VCR viewing was inadvertently omitted from the London questionnaire.) Children were given verbal directions to list the VCR tapes they saw. This error could account for the very small number (5) of London children who listed a video tape for this question).

In order to expedite and simplify the questionnaire administration, children were not asked to indicate whether they watched each program in its entirety or the

amount of time they actually viewed each program. To do so would have frustrated many of the children, some of whom were not very good readers or writers. Average viewing times were, therefore, computed on the assumption that all the listed programs (which were actually broadcast) and tapes were watched in their entirety.

Children's Self-Reported List of Television and VCR
Programs

Interview

For the interview, children were asked to remember all the activities they did the previous day and evening. If children said that they watched a particular television or VCR program, they were then asked to remember how much of the program they actually watched.

For both the questionnaire and the interview, average total viewing times are based upon the approximate length of the cited VCR tapes and scheduled running times of listed television programs. If children listed two or more programs aired simultaneously, then the assumption was made that the child watched equal amounts of both programs. If children reported that they saw a specified amount of television but could not specify the titles of the programs watched, then these times were included in the means and medians, if this information did not conflict with other reported activities. If children said that they watched an unspecified amount of TV during the previous day and could not remember program titles or the amount of time they watched the program, then these TV programs were excluded from the total viewing time means and medians.

APPENDIX 8

NOTES ON READING LEVEL CODING PROCEDURES

Ideally, all the children in the London and New York samples would have been given the same standardized reading test. On the basis of their test scores, children would have been classified as above average, average or below average readers; the reference level being the mean reading score of all respondents taking the test.

Because of time limitations and financial considerations, this option had to be rejected. Instead, the manner of assessment was determined by whichever of the following methods was available to the researcher, in descending order of desirability.

- 1- Grade on the most recent standardized reading test.
- 2- Teacher's assessment of child's reading ability
- 3- Class placement if classes were organized according to reading ability.

It should be noted that three different standardized reading tests had been given to various segments of the sample, depending on the school district. Some London schools gave the Burt Word Reading Test; the New York City schools gave the California Achievement Test; and the Mabcor Park School gave the CTBS reading test. While all three tests are standardized and objective measures of reading ability, one must assume that the tests were not normalized on the same populations, so test score comparisons should be made only with some degree of caution.

If test scores were not available, then teachers, or

in some London schools, the head teacher, rated children according to their reading ability relative to the "normal child of the same chronological age." Again, inter-class and inter-school comparisons should be cautiously made since one teacher's criteria for "average reading ability" will not necessarily be the same as another teacher's criteria.

If no test scores were available for children in New York City, then the child's class placement was used as an indicator of reading ability, since classes were generally organized according to reading level.

Standardized reading tests have a wide standard error of measurement (plus or minus six months), and the tests do not discriminate very well for the very high and very low scorers. So even standardized tests are not able to distinguish between many levels of reading ability.

Because of the inaccuracies in standardized reading tests and because many children were rated according to method 2 when reading tests were not available, all reading test scores were collapsed and/or converted into one of three ordinal categories: above average, average or below average reading ability. Generally, children with CTBS stanine scores of three or less, California Achievement Test scores of more than six months below grade level (more than one standard deviation below the mean), or Burt Word reading age scores more than six months below the child's chronological age were coded as below average readers.

CTBS scores between the 4th and 6th stanines, California Achievement Test scores between plus or minus

six months of grade level or Burt word reading age scores between plus or minus six months of the child's chronological age were coded as average readers. All other children were coded as above average readers.

APPENDIX 9READING LEVEL AND PARENTS' OCCUPATIONAL STATUS

Most sociologists have been able to demonstrate rather conclusively that reading level, as measured by standardized tests, are very strongly correlated with the economic and social status of the child's parents e.g., Jencks (1979); Bowles and Gintis (1979). Since race and ethnicity are usually correlated with economic and social status, we tend to find that race and ethnicity are also correlated with reading level.

This study did not find any significant relationship between reading level and race/ethnicity for the New York sample, but it did find that London Blacks and, to a lesser extent, Other Non-English speakers, do not read as well as London Whites.

For the New York sample, children in all ethnic/racial groups were just as likely to be above average readers as below average readers. Interestingly, Hispanics constituted the group with the largest percentage of above average readers and the smallest percentages of below average readers. Cramer's V for this table was only .120, Chi square was .190.

For the London sample, all of the five Blacks in the sample and 40% of the Other Non-English speakers were below average readers, as compared with only 29% of the White English speakers. Cramer's V for this table was somewhat higher than the coefficient for the New York table (.219 with a Chi square significant at the .05 level).

Race/ethnicity does not seem to explain any of the

variance in reading levels in New York and only a very small part of the variance in London. We must, however, be reminded that the New York sample was drawn from a predominantly lower, middle, and upper middle class population. The lowest occupational statuses were under-represented. Therefore, in New York, occupational status might very well be mediating any particular effects of race/ethnicity.

In London, the sample was fairly evenly drawn from all four occupational status categories, and so we might be seeing more direct effects of race/ethnicity on reading level than we saw in New York. It is also possible to conclude that the London figures reflect a more virulent strain of racial/ethnic educational discrimination than might exist in New York.

For both New York and London students, parents' occupational status is a much better predictor of reading level than race/ethnicity.

RESPONDENT'S READING LEVEL BY PARENTS' OCCUPATIONAL STATUS

<u>OCCUPATIONAL STATUS</u>	<u>MANUAL UNSKILLED</u>	<u>MANUAL SKILLED</u>	<u>WHITE COLLAR SEMI-SKILLED</u>	<u>WHITE COLLAR SKILLED PROF</u>
<u>READING LEVEL</u>				
ABOVE AVERAGE	18%	32%	39%	52%
AVERAGE	33	29	33	38
BELOW AVERAGE	50	38	28	10
	<u>100%</u>	<u>100%</u>	<u>100%</u>	<u>100%</u>
N=	(40)	(34)	(51)	(82)

CRAMER'S V= .261

CHI SQUARE SIGNIFICANCE=.0001

GAMMA = -.424

When we controlled for city of residence, we found that while parents' occupational status was still significantly correlated with reading level in New York and London, the correlation was much stronger in London than in New York. In New York, Cramer's V was .236 (Chi Square significance level was 0.03), while in London, it was 0.373 (Chi square significance level of .0007.)

These findings seem to confirm William J. Wilson's argument in The Declining Significance of Race (1980) that socio-economic factors are much greater determinants of economic status (and indirectly, educational attainment) than are racial/ethnic factors.

APPENDIX 10

CHILDREN ESTIMATES OF HOW OFTEN THEY READ AT HOME,
PLAYED GAMES AT HOME, MET FRIENDS AWAY FROM THEIR HOUSES,
TALKED TO FAMILY MEMBERS AND LISTENED TO MUSIC DURING THE
PRECEDING WEEK (a)

(BY PERCENTAGE OF THE ENTIRE SAMPLE) (b)

<u>FREQUENCY</u> <u>ACTIVITY</u>	<u>HARDLY</u> <u>EVER</u>	<u>SOME</u> <u>DAYS</u>	<u>ALMOST</u> <u>ALWAYS</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>
READ AT HOME	17% (-6%)	37% (+4%)	46% (+1%)	(362)
PLAY GAMES AT HOME	29% (-4)	42% (+1)	29% (+2)	(359)
MEET FRIENDS AWAY FROM HOUSE	39% (-3)	36% (+13)	25% (-11)	(346)
TALK TO FAMILY MEMBERS	23% (-4)	35% (+1)	42% (+2)	(349)
LISTEN TO MUSIC	22% (-7)	32% (+11)	46% (-1)	(359)

- (a) We must cautiously interpret this table since these figures are based on children's perceptions of their previous weeks' activities rather than a more objective measure of the actual frequency that these activities occurred.
- (b) Percentage differences between the New York and London samples are in parentheses.

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