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Aysen Bakir, Illinois State University
Gregory M. Rose, University of Washington
Aviv Shoham, University of Haifa

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A Multi-Perspective Approach to Family Communication and Parental Control of TV Viewing

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Background

The purchasing power of children has grown steadily for more than three decades in response to increased sources of income among children, increasingly diverse and complex family structures, and the continued growth of dual income families and time-pressed parents (McNeal 1992; 1998; Snider 2002).

Research on family communication has consistently utilized a single respondent, with early research generally focusing on the ratings of adolescents (Moschis and Mitchell 1986) and later research examining the perceptions of mothers of younger children, generally under the age of 10 (Carlson, Grossbart, Tripp 1990; Rose; Bush, and Kahle 1998). One of the key findings in the children’s influence literature is the discrepancy between adolescent’ and parent’ ratings (Beatty and Talpade 1994; Belch, Belch, and Ceresino 1985; Foxman and Tansuhaj 1988; Foxman, Tansuhaj, and Ekstrom 1989). The importance of family communication, however, has only been established utilizing a single rater (Carlson, Grossbart, and Tripp 1990; Carlson, Grossbart, and Walsh 1990; Rose, Bush, and Kahle 1998), leaving open the question of potential differences across respondents. This study investigates the relationship between family communication and parental control of television viewing and the degree that these perceptions converge or diverge across family members.

Method

A questionnaire was distributed to married couples with at least one child between the ages of eight and twelve years old in the Northern part of Israel. The children took the questionnaire to their parents. Each of the family members filled out the questionnaire separately and the questionnaires were sent back to the school with the child. Of the 116 questionnaires distributed, 92 complete sets of responses were returned for a response rate of 79%.

Two dimensions of family communication were assessed with Moschis, Moore, and Smith’s (1984) scale, which included a total of ten items. Typical items for these dimensions were: “I tell my child that buying things that he/she likes is important, even if others don’t like them,” for concept orientation; and “I tell my child what things he/she should buy” for socio-orientation. All of the items were measured on a 5-point scale with 1 being very seldom and 5 being very often.

Control of TV viewing was measured by the following items: “I place restriction on which programs my child can watch on TV,” “…when my child can watch TV,” “…how many hours each day my child can watch TV.” The scale was measured by a 5-point scale ranging from “never” to “always.”

A multitrait/multimethod (MTMM) approach was used as an analytic method of examining the patterns of agreement and disagreement among respondents on variables of interest (Campbell and Fiske 1959).

Findings

This study examined the consistency of perceptions between mothers, fathers, and their children regarding family communica-

tion and parental control over their children’s television viewing. The results generally supported the validity of the measures and showed agreement between family members.

The correlation between children’ ratings of the extent that their parents engaged in socio-oriented communication and controlled their TV viewing was high and exceeded some of the corresponding values in the validity diagonal. Children may generalize parental restrictiveness and have difficulty differentiating between parental restrictions in one area (e.g., control of TV viewing) from parental restrictiveness in general. Thus, the high correlation between children’s perceptions of socio-oriented communication and control of TV viewing may indicate that children tend to experience parental restrictiveness as a general trait.

The pattern of relationships found was generally consistent across family members. However, the significance of two correlations (concept- and socio- oriented communication, and concept-oriented communication and control TV viewing) differed. Socio- and concept-oriented communication were independent (not significantly correlated) for mothers and fathers but negatively correlated for children. Again, children may experience parental communication in a more unidimensional fashion than their parents.

Citations


