

6. RELATIONSHIP OF MEDIA ENVIRONMENT TO MEDIA USE

The environment within which young people encounter media affects their media behavior. As we noted in Chapter 3, kids who have their own personal media — whether a TV in their bedroom, a portable radio, or their own laptop computer — have much easier access to and, thus, are likely to spend more time with those media. Similarly, young people who experience few or no parental attempts to regulate media use are likely to use media differently than kids who face such rules. Finally, the general orientation toward media within the home can influence young people’s media behavior.

For example, kids from homes where a TV constantly plays, even during meals, likely use TV differently than those from homes where TV is not a constant companion.

Of course, many indicators of the household media environment are interrelated. For example, as we saw in Chapter 3, children and adolescents from homes in which parents regulate media behavior are less likely than children whose parents impose few or no media controls to have a TV or a video game console in their bedroom. Similarly, young people from high TV orientation homes (i.e., homes in which the TV is on constantly, is on during most meals, and in which there are no TV rules; see Chapter 3), are substantially more likely than other kids to have one or more of their own personal media (e.g., a TV in their bedroom or a personal computer). In other words, our several individual measures may well be tapping some more general, single dimension of the household media environment.

Personal media and media exposure

How does having access to personal media (e.g., a TV in the bedroom) affect media exposure? To answer this question we compared kids who report having their own TV, video game

console, or computer to those who do not, on the basis of both overall media exposure and use of each of the various individual media. We recognize, of course, that having a video game console in the bedroom is coterminous with having a TV; the former is useless without the latter. Nevertheless, because the addition of a video game console arguably adds media possibilities, it may well change the way the TV is used, and thus should be examined independently from TV. (For example, adding a video game console to a TV set could conceivably operate to displace TV viewing *per se*.)

Relatively large differences in time spent with TV, video games and computers emerge when comparing kids who have them in their bedroom with those who don’t.

As shown in Table 6-A, personal media ownership substantially increases the amount of time young people are exposed to each of the particular media found in their rooms, to media overall, and to various other individual media. Overall media

time shows the greatest effect. Having one’s own TV, video game console, or computer increases overall media exposure by at least two hours daily (the differences range from 2:02 for TV to 2:19 for video game consoles).

Relatively large differences in time spent with each of these three media emerge when comparing kids who have them in their bedroom with those who don’t. For example, kids with a TV in the bedroom watch almost 1½ hours more TV each day than kids without a bedroom TV. Similarly, those with a video game console in their bedroom triple the game-playing time of kids without (47 minutes vs. 15 minutes daily)²⁴ and computer owners double the computer time of non-owners (1:30 vs. 47 minutes). Clearly, easy access to a given medium makes a substantial difference in exposure to that medium. More interesting, however, are the related increases in exposure to media other than the one being examined. That is, youngsters with a TV in their bedroom not only spend more time watching TV, but they also

TABLE 6-A

Personal Media and Media Exposure

Personal medium ²	Total media exposure	TV	Videos/movies	Video games ¹	Reading	Music	Computer
TV							
Yes	9:09 ^a	3:31 ^a	1:16 ^a	0:38 ^a	0:38 ^a	1:46	1:02
No	7:07 ^b	2:04 ^b	0:58 ^b	0:17 ^b	0:54 ^b	1:40	1:01
Video game console³							
Yes	9:42 ^a	3:37 ^a	1:23 ^a	0:47 ^a	0:39	1:46	1:05
No	7:23 ^b	2:30 ^b	0:58 ^b	0:15 ^b	0:47	1:43	1:00
Computer³							
Yes	9:58 ^a	3:21 ^a	1:23 ^a	0:37 ^a	0:48 ^a	2:00 ^a	1:30 ^a
No	7:48 ^b	2:55 ^b	1:05 ^b	0:29 ^b	0:40 ^b	1:35 ^b	0:47 ^b

¹ Includes only time playing console-based video games; the same patterns hold when both console-based and handheld video games are combined (see Appendix 6.1).

² Refers to a TV or video game console in the bedroom and to a desktop or laptop computer in the bedroom.

³ Since 17% of the sample indicated there was no video game console in their home, and 14% indicated there was no computer in their home, we repeated this analysis using only respondents from homes in which a video game console or a computer was available. Results were remarkably similar to those reported here. Differences in overall media exposure and in exposure to individual media changed by only a few minutes; those that were statistically significant for the entire sample remained so for the more limited sample.

Note: Within each cluster, only those mean times in each column that do not share a common superscript differ from one another with statistical reliability. Those mean times without a superscript, or those that share a common superscript, do not differ by a large enough margin to ensure statistical reliability.

report more exposure than their non-TV-having counterparts to videos and movies (18 minutes more) and more time playing video games (21 minutes more). Conversely, having a TV in one's bedroom significantly reduces leisure print exposure. Kids with no bedroom TV average 16 more minutes of daily reading than kids with a TV.

Similar results emerge for video game consoles in the bedroom. That is, young people who have a video game console in their bedroom not only spend more time playing video games than those who do not have them, but they also watch more TV (1:07 more) and more videos and movies (25 minutes more). They also spend less time reading (eight minutes less), although this difference is not statistically reliable. Of course, the findings for these two media are probably partly dependent on the fact that having a video game console in the bedroom means that one also has a TV. To some extent, we may be looking at the effect of essentially the same media environment in two slightly different ways. For example, kids with a video game console report more TV viewing than those with only a TV, a possible indication that adding a video game console to the bedroom TV somehow operates to intensify the TV environment.

Having one's own computer, however, arguably creates a different kind of environment. The functionality of a computer does not depend on the presence of a TV. Rather, it brings something new and different in both the range and type of information available, and in the demands it places on those who use it. For

example, computers arguably require skills that are not inherent in TV viewing or video game playing. Thus it is particularly interesting to find that having one's own computer not only locates the *highest* level of overall daily media exposure (9:58), but that the presence of a computer is also strongly related to exposure to every one of the other media we have been examining. For some media the relationships are similar to those found for personal TVs and video game consoles, but for others a very different pattern emerges. For example, compared to kids who do not have their own laptop or personal computer, kids who do watch more TV and more videos/movies, and they spend more time playing video games — all patterns that replicate those found for personal TV sets and video game consoles.²⁵ Unlike the findings for bedroom TVs or video game consoles, however, having one's own computer is also related to music listening. Youngsters with their own computer listen to music 25 minutes more daily than those who do not have their own personal computer. And finally, directly counter to negative relationships found for personal TVs and video game consoles, kids with their own computer report significantly *more* time reading (eight minutes more daily) than their counterparts without computers.

In Chapter 3 we noted that several demographic variables are related to the likelihood of having one's own TV, video game console, or computer. For example, age is negatively related to the likelihood of having a video game console and positively related to having a computer; a higher proportion of boys than girls have

Box 6.1 Enforcing Rules Makes a Difference

The entire sample was asked two general questions about rules governing TV viewing. The first, answered by “Yes” or “No,” simply asked whether or not there were rules governing TV in their family. The second asked about the degree to which such rules were enforced (“How often do your parents make sure you follow the rules about watching TV?”), with response options including “most of the time,” “some of the time,” “a little of the time,” and “never.” These two items enabled us to examine 8- to 18-year-olds’ media exposure in relation to both the presence or absence of TV rules *and* the degree to which such rules are enforced. The following table groups youngsters with TV rules enforced most of the time, youngsters with rules enforced some, little, or never, and youngsters with no TV rules.

Kids who report TV rules generally report lower levels of exposure to most media and enforcement of those rules also plays a role. Although most of the differences are not statistically reliable (primarily because our decision to include youngsters who reported enforcement “some of the time” in the same group with those who responded little or never makes our comparison relatively conservative), there is a tendency for frequent enforcement of TV rules to go hand in hand with less

media exposure. Kids who report that their parents enforce the rules most of the time report 30 minutes less overall media exposure and 12 minutes less TV viewing than kids whose parents are less strict about enforcement. High-enforcement kids also spend significantly less time with video games and on the computer, and significantly more time reading than their moderate- to little-enforcement counterparts. The only break in this pattern is for exposure to videos/DVDs/movies, for which both high-enforcement kids and kids reporting no rules report more exposure than kids whose parents impose rules but enforce them less frequently. One possible explanation for this finding is that videos and/or DVDs may provide a means of control for parents who impose TV rules. That is, they may exert control over what their children view by participating in the selection of videos/DVDs, and in so doing may increase the amount of time their kids spend with those particular media.

There has been relatively little attention in the research literature to enforcement of media rules. In our view, this is a potentially rich vein to be mined in subsequent studies.

Average Media Exposure in Relation to TV Rules and Rule Enforcement¹

	Total exposure	TV	Videos/movies	Video games	Reading	Music	Computer
High enforcement of TV rules	7:16 ^a	2:41 ^a	1:16 ^a	0:34 ^a	0:55 ^a	1:20 ^a	0:31 ^a
Low enforcement of TV rules	7:48 ^a	2:53 ^a	0:58 ^b	0:50 ^b	0:40 ^b	1:33 ^a	0:55 ^b
No TV rules	9:17 ^b	3:19 ^b	1:13 ^a	0:53 ^b	0:39 ^b	1:56 ^b	1:16 ^c

¹ These numbers differ from those in Table 6-B because they are based on all 8- to 18-year-olds.

Note: Within each cluster, only those mean times in each column that do not share a common superscript differ from one another with statistical reliability. Those mean times without a superscript, or those that share a common superscript, do not differ by a large enough margin to ensure statistical reliability.

a TV, a video game console, and/or a computer in their bedroom; African American kids are more likely than others to report their own TV and video game console, and so on. Thus, it is possible that the differences in media exposure related to personal media ownership are to some extent due to related demographic differences in distribution of personal media. For this reason, we also examined the relationships between personal media and amount of media exposure while controlling for relevant demographic factors. With very few exceptions, none of these controls changed the basic relationships. For example, the basic finding that kids with any of these three media in their bedroom report substantially more overall media exposure was not affected; boy or girl, younger or older, African American or White, low or high income — it makes little difference. Within every sub-category we examined, kids with their own TV, video game console, or computer reported substantially higher levels of overall media exposure. With few exceptions, the pattern of results displayed in Table 6-A for each of the individual media also holds. That is, controls for the various demographic characteristics do not change the overriding conclusion that personal ownership of any of the three

media is related to more TV, video, and movie viewing, to more video game exposure, and to less reading. Nor do such controls alter the finding that having one’s own computer is related to the amount of time spent with each other medium.²⁶ Clearly, those young people who have access to their own personal media have substantially higher levels of media exposure. Finally, not only does having their own personal media increase young people’s exposure to those media, it also affects the social context of their media use. For example, among all 8- to 18-year-olds who watched TV the preceding day, 19% of those with their own TV watched alone the entire time compared to 12% of those without their own TV (a statistically reliable difference). In other words, kids with their own TV tend to watch more, and a higher proportion of them report that they view alone.

Media rules

It seems obvious that whether or not parents attempt to impose some kind of control on their children’s media behavior should directly affect young people’s media exposure. Simply the act of attempting to regulate media behavior indicates an environment

TABLE 6-B

Media Rules¹ and Media Exposure Among 7th- to 12th-Graders

	Total media exposure	TV	Videos/movies	Video games ²	Reading	Music	Computer
TV rules							
Yes	7:07 ^a	2:18 ^a	1:07	0:18 ^a	0:50 ^a	1:30 ^a	0:50 ^a
No	8:57 ^b	2:58 ^b	1:01	0:28 ^b	0:38 ^b	2:19 ^b	1:21 ^b
Video game rules³							
Yes	8:36	2:52	1:20	0:25	0:43	1:51	1:05
No	8:59	3:04	0:58	0:31	0:34	2:18	1:21
Computer rules⁴							
Yes	8:22	2:36	1:06	0:25	0:43	1:59	1:15
No	8:59	2:59	0:58	0:28	0:36	2:20	1:27

¹ Respondents indicated their parents either have rules about content (e.g., which shows, which games) or about time (i.e., how long they can spend using media).

² Includes only time playing console video games.

³ Includes only 7th- to 12th-graders with a video game console in their home.

⁴ Includes only 7th- to 12th-graders with a computer in their home.

Note: Within each cluster, only those items in each column that do not share a common superscript differ from one another with statistical reliability. Those items without a superscript, or those that share a common superscript, do not differ by a large enough margin to ensure statistical reliability.

in which the media likely play a less central role in day-to-day household activities. Moreover, although some parents are more concerned with the kinds of content their children encounter than with amount of exposure, a great many media rules aim directly at reducing the amount of time kids spend with TV, the computer, or video games.

We examine the relationship between media rules and media exposure in much the same way that we look at the influence of personal media, except that for in this analysis we focus only on 7th- to 12th-graders.²⁷ Table 6-B summarizes mean daily exposure to each of the individual media and to overall media exposure in relation to whether junior and senior high school students report the existence of household rules regulating TV viewing, video game playing, or computer activities. The first and most striking result to emerge from Table 6-B is that the presence or absence of family rules governing TV viewing (that is, rules about what can and cannot be seen and/or about amount of viewing) is significantly related to amount of overall media exposure and to time spent with all but one of the individual media we

have been examining. Kids from homes in which there are TV rules report almost two hours less (1:50) daily media exposure than kids from homes with no rules. Somewhat surprisingly, TV exposure accounts for only 40 minutes of the overall difference between the two groups. That is, kids with rules watch TV 2:18

daily and kids without rules watch 2:58.²⁸ The remaining 1¼ hours is accounted for by differences in exposure to the other media. Thus, kids who live in homes where there is no attempt to regulate TV viewing spend significantly more time listening to music (49 minutes more), using a computer (31 minutes more), and playing video games (ten minutes more). On the other hand, kids from homes where TV is regulated spend 12 minutes more reading each day, and six minutes more watching videos or movies.²⁹ It appears, then, that the presence or absence of TV rules may indicate a more general orientation toward media — perhaps even toward popular culture. In any case, in homes where the TV is regulated, so too, it seems, are most other media.

The second result apparent in Table 6-B is that, counter to our initial expectations, the presence or absence of rules governing both video gaming and computer use *is not* related to the

Parental regulation of TV behavior

does make a difference, even among older youth.

amount of overall media exposure or to the amount of exposure to any of the individual media — *including the medium ostensibly governed*. That is, although kids who live in homes where parents attempt to control video gaming spend less time with

video games than do kids with no video game rules, the six-minute difference is not significant. Similarly, kids from homes where there are rules about computer use engage in computer activities 12 minutes less than kids where there are no rules, but again the difference is not significant.

TABLE 6-C

Household TV Orientation and Media Exposure

	Total media exposure	TV	Videos/movies	Video games ¹	Reading	Music	Computer
TV usually on							
Yes	9:42 ^a	3:37 ^a	1:20 ^a	0:40 ^a	0:37 ^a	1:56 ^a	1:09 ^a
No	7:22 ^b	2:30 ^b	1:03 ^b	0:22 ^b	0:49 ^b	1:32 ^b	0:54
TV on during meals							
Yes	9:06 ^a	3:26 ^a	1:15	0:34 ^a	0:41	1:50 ^a	1:01
No	7:35 ^b	2:25 ^b	1:04	0:27 ^b	0:47	1:34 ^b	1:04
High TV orientation²							
Yes	10:22 ^a	3:58 ^a	1:20	0:45 ^a	0:36 ^a	2:06 ^a	1:14 ^a
No	7:57 ^b	2:46 ^b	1:09	0:28 ^b	0:45 ^b	1:37 ^b	0:58 ^b

¹ Includes only time spent playing console video games.

² High TV orientation households are those in which the TV is on most of the time and the TV is usually on during meals and there are no parental rules regulating TV viewing.

Note: Within each cluster, only those items in each column that do not share a common superscript differ from one another with statistical reliability. Those items without a superscript, or those that share a common superscript, do not differ by a large enough margin to ensure statistical reliability.

These results are somewhat perplexing. On the one hand, there is no particular reason to expect that rules about video games or computers should be related to media exposure overall, or to exposure to other individual media in the way that TV is. On the other hand, even if video game rules and computer rules are not related to TV exposure or reading or music listening, we expected to find a relationship between video game rules and video game exposure and between computer rules and computer exposure. The failure of the obtained differences to reach statistical significance, then, is both surprising and a bit puzzling.

The overall conclusion to be drawn from Table 6-B is that parental regulation of TV behavior does make a difference, even among older youth (7th- to 12th-graders).³⁰ It is as if TV rules operate as a proxy for regulation of media in general. The imposition of TV rules is related to reductions in TV viewing, video gaming, music listening, and computer activities, and to an increase in reading. Rules associated with video game playing and computer use relate to the different kinds of media exposure in much the same way as do TV rules, but the differences consistently fail to reach statistical significance. To some extent this may be this due to the relatively small numbers of 7th- to 12th-graders reporting rules about either of these two media. Finally, it is also worth noting that establishing rules may be only a first step. As Box 6.1 indicates, there is tentative evidence that the degree to which parents enforce such rules may also play an important role.

Household TV orientation

In Chapter 3 we defined household TV orientation as the degree to which TV plays a central role in the home. We assess household TV orientation with several items that Medrich (1979) used to identify what he called “constant TV households” (also see Medrich, et al., 1982). Table 6-C displays mean daily exposure to media overall and to each individual medium as a function of each of the two items assessing constant TV, and in relation to whether or not 8- to 18-year-olds come from homes classified as high TV orientation households.³¹

In addition to the relationship between TV rules and media exposure noted in the preceding section,

Table 6-C clearly shows that living in a home where the TV plays constantly is positively related to exposure to each of the electronic media and negatively related to print exposure. Much the same pattern holds for homes in which the TV is on during meals, except that the relationships for video/movie exposure, reading, and computers are not statistically significant (indeed, the relationship for computers is reversed, although the difference in time is only three minutes). In short, both of the individual items taken from Elliot Medrich’s work (1979) on “constant TV households” are related to media exposure.

When those items are combined with whether or not there are family rules about TV viewing to form our high TV orientation index, the relationship remains strong. That is, the 25% of the sample of young people classified as from high TV orientation

Living in a home where the TV plays
constantly is positively related to exposure
to each of the electronic media and
negatively related to print exposure.

homes (i.e., kids who indicated that the TV is usually on in their home, *and* that it is usually on during meals, *and* that there are no rules regulating TV use) report substantially more overall media exposure and more exposure to most individual media than those from non-high TV orientation homes. Again, reading is the exception. High TV orientation kids also report more exposure than their counterparts who answered “Yes” to either of the constant TV questions or “No” to the TV rules questions. Compared to others, 8- to 18-year-olds from high TV orientation homes average 1:12 more TV exposure, spend 25 minutes more with video games, 29 minutes more with music, 16 minutes more with computers, and 11 minutes more with videos/movies (this last difference is not significant). They read an average of nine minutes less per day. The result is that kids from high TV orientation households report 2:25 more overall media exposure each day. Clearly, in homes where the TV plays a central role in defining the environment, all media exposure increases. We suspect, then, that the TV orientation index is probably tapping a more general orientation toward, if not popular culture, certainly toward acceptance of entertainment media.

Summing up

Each of the three characteristics of the media environment that we examine is related to media exposure. The simplest summary is that the more available media are — whether because a kid has his or her own TV or computer in her bedroom, because the parents don’t attempt to control their children’s media behavior,

or because the home is characterized by a constantly playing TV set — the higher young people’s exposure levels to all but print media. In addition, it appears that TV may be the most important medium in the environment, at least in terms of predicting overall media exposure. That is, the presence or absence of constraints on TV typically locates differential levels of exposure to all other media (and, of course, to overall media exposure). For the other media, the relationship sometimes emerges, and sometimes does not. For example, on the one hand, kids with their own computer

(whether a personal computer in the bedroom or their own laptop) report significantly more exposure to every one of the other media than do kids without their own computer. On the other hand, there are no statistically reliable differences in media exposure

between kids who do and do not report family rules controlling computer use (although there are differences that do not reach statistical significance). And perhaps most striking, when we look at exposure in relation to high TV orientation, a classification that most clearly separates kids living in an environment where media access is free and easy from those who live with more constraints, overall media exposure reaches its highest levels. High TV orientation kids report almost 10½ hours daily media exposure, almost 2½ hours more each day than their lower TV orientation counterparts. In other words, it is clear that environments that, for whatever reason, make it relatively easy for kids to access TV, also seem to make it easy to access most other media, and the result is that young people from such an environment are among the most exposed to media content.

Clearly, in homes where the TV plays a central role in defining the environment, all media exposure increases.
