

# Television and the Moral Judgment of the Young Child

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Since the advent of television, critics have charged that television viewing adversely effects the moral attitudes and values of its young viewers. The present study was an investigation of the relation of television viewing and young children's moral judgment. Seventy-two boys and girls at each of three grade levels (kindergarten, second grade, and fourth grade) were interviewed with an array of moral reasoning measures. The mother of each child assisted by keeping a television diary for 2 weeks as well as providing extensive background information including family television habits. Among kindergartners, heavy television viewing was moderately associated with less advanced moral reasoning on each of the moral judgment measures. No relationship was found at the second- and fourth-grade levels. Total viewing rather than viewing of any particular type of program was associated with moral judgment among kindergartners, suggesting that the association may not result from any deleterious effect of particular types of content.

Since the advent of television, critics have asserted that television has a debilitating effect on the character of youth. Although similar indictments were made against radio, movies, and comic books, there are a number of reasons why this latest charge deserves serious consideration. Unlike earlier mass media, television has captured the attention of children to an unparalleled degree and now accounts for more of the child's waking hours than any other activity. Furthermore, the child's attentiveness is heightened by the vividness and the immediacy of the television medium. Unlike adults, who discount the reality of the programs they view, young children seem particularly ready to identify with television characters. Each of these factors seems likely to increase the amount and signifi-

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cance of what children learn from watching television (Pearl, Bouthilet, & Lazar, 1982; Schramm, Lyle, & Parker, 1961).

Public concern about possible effects of television on youth has focused on the high levels of violence in television programming. This focus has resulted in a voluminous research literature which has examined televised violence's link to the violence performed by viewers. Most professional reviews and the more selective reviews of textbooks have concluded that the weight of the evidence indicates that television violence does increase viewer aggression. This conclusion is strengthened by the convergence of studies involving highly varied viewing materials, types of viewers, and measures of aggression and violence, as well as a variety of methodological techniques (Parke & Slaby, 1983). More recently, a growing body of research has demonstrated that television can also modify children's behavior in a prosocial direction. Specific behaviors for which such a television effect has been demonstrated include the following: generosity, helping, friendliness, cooperation, delay of gratification, and adherence to rules (Rushton, 1979).

While researchers have examined the effect of television on a variety of social behaviors relevant to character, virtually no research has investigated the direct effect of television viewing upon the moral reasoning and judgment of the viewer. Early critics were particularly concerned about the ethical and moral views taught by television, which they saw as exerting a corrupting influence. More recent critics have asserted that television teaches that illegal and immoral actions often work. In fact, the critics continue, socially disapproved actions are often more successful than socially approved acts. Even law enforcement officers and other heroes break the law and other moral codes. Criminal and other illegal activity frequently escapes punishment. Television's message, the critics conclude, is that goodness and virtue are rarely sufficient to realize success. Rather, if one's goals are important, the wise person does whatever is necessary to achieve them.

Alternatively, others have argued that television's impact on the moral reasoning of young viewers is primarily a positive one. According to this view, television programs regularly raise a host of moral issues in an attractive and captivating manner. Children as viewers are forced to confront a remarkably wide array of moral issues. Within a single program, a young viewer may vicariously confront an opportunity for theft, be tempted to tell an untruth to a friend, and undergo a struggle not to betray a public oath. It is through such experiences that television comes to function as a moral teacher by enhancing the child's reflections within the moral domain (Ryan, 1976). However, at present there exists scant research to either confirm or disconfirm any effect of television on the moral reasoning and values of the child (Shantz, 1983).

Moral judgment research during the last decade has been dominated by the work of Kohlberg (1984) and his associates. They have adopted the Piagetian perspective which articulates development as a process in which individuals

actively create modes of understanding. Hence, from a Kohlbergian perspective, development can be seen as a succession of more adequate ways of understanding the moral order of the universe. More specifically, moral judgment develops through a sequence of learning critical features to differentiate between right and wrong. In this system, the most rudimentary moral reasoning is that if an act is not punished, then it must be ethically acceptable (moral), whereas moral reasoning at its highest stage defines morality by appeal to rational and universal principles of justice.

Although the Kohlberg model has generated a considerable body of research, there has been no attempt to explore television's contribution to the development of the individual's moral reasoning. Perhaps television research and moral judgment research have not intersected because Kohlberg's measurement technique uses hypothetical moral dilemmas of considerable complexity. If television does affect the moral reasoning of children, it is likely that this effect begins long before Kohlberg's measurement procedures become appropriate. In fact, as the child's cognition becomes more adultlike and television is viewed more as fantasy, it may become less consequential to moral reasoning.

More recently, a number of researchers have developed measurement procedures designed to explore the moral reasoning of young children. Of particular note has been the work of Damon (1977). He has suggested that early development does not deal with issues of transgression and punishment as in the Kohlberg dilemmas, but rather it deals with concerns of how to share fairly and how to distribute limited resources. Damon argued that this domain of distributive justice is of central importance to the young child's daily experiences. Damon's procedure is to interview children, asking them about sharing, conflicts of fairness, and promises that occur during their interaction with family and friends. For example, children are asked how a classroom should divide its earnings from a class project. "Should the poorest child get the most? Should the child who worked the hardest get the most?" These and other probes allow the interviewer to understand the structural or stage level at which the child is reasoning.

In a similar vein, Eisenberg-Berg (1979) has emphasized the importance of differentiating between prosocial moral reasoning and prohibition-oriented moral reasoning. She maintained that the Kohlberg dilemmas focus on rules, authorities, and punishments. Even when dilemmas do deal with occasions when someone may be helped, invariably, the subject must choose to break a law or disobey an authority to do so. To correct this imbalance, Eisenberg has developed a procedure designed to explore children's reasoning about helping others when the primary cost for such help is personal sacrifice rather than committing a transgression or disobeying an authority. Her procedure does not use a stage model like Damon's, but rather it focuses on developing a taxonomy of justifications used by children in their reasoning about prosocial behavior. This research has demonstrated clear developmental trends in prosocial reasoning of children.

In an elaborate program of research, Turiel and his associates (Davidson,

Turiel, & Black, 1983) have demonstrated that even young children differentiate between moral and conventional social issues. This research necessitated the development of moral dilemmas of the Kohlberg type that are appropriate for use with young children. These dilemmas have focused on the violation of familiar rules at school and home. For example, in one dilemma a student takes advantage of the teacher's trust and steals something which belongs to the school. The Turiel scoring procedure is similar to that developed by Eisenberg. Turiel analyzes the children's reflections by identifying the justification the child gives as to why a particular rule violation is wrong.

Hence, recent advances in the measurement of the moral judgments and reflections of young children now present researchers with a variety of avenues for testing the presumed link between television viewing and moral reasoning. The present study was undertaken to exploit this opportunity. In view of the availability of plausible rationales for expecting either a negative or positive relationship between viewing and moral reasoning, this initial inquiry was undertaken without benefit of an explicit hypothesis regarding their relationship.

## METHOD

### Subjects

Seventy-two children and their mothers participated in the study. Boys and girls were equally represented, with a third of the sample drawn from each of the following grades: kindergarten ( $M = 6.2$  years), second grade ( $M = 8.1$  years), and fourth grade ( $M = 10.0$  years). Most subjects attended the same public school, with six subjects (two at each grade level) recruited from a neighboring parochial school in order to maintain comparable cell sizes. More than 60% of the mothers were college graduates, 54% were employed outside the home on a part-time or full-time basis. In 90% of the homes, the father was present. All fathers were employed, with a mean Duncan (1961) occupational status index of 59 (possible range of 1–99: auto salesman = 35, speech therapist = 57, accountant = 70, and physician = 87).

### Procedure

Home interviews were conducted for each participating child. As fathers were rarely present, mothers' responses were used exclusively. In addition to providing basic demographic information, each mother was questioned extensively regarding her family's television usage. A particular focus of the interview was family rules and regulations concerning television use. Mothers were also instructed in the use of the television diaries. Home interviews lasted from 30 to 40 min.

Each child was interviewed by the senior author on two separate occasions. Both interviews lasted approximately 20 to 30 min and were generally conducted 2 weeks apart. Interviews of the public school children occurred in a mobile

laboratory parked adjacent to the school; the parochial school children were interviewed in an unoccupied office. The first interview consisted of two sets of moral dilemmas, and the second interview consisted of the final set of dilemmas. The dilemma sets were administered in a counterbalanced order, whereas the individual dilemmas were presented in the order listed below. All interviews were recorded and transcribed.

### Measures

*Distributive justice reasoning* was assessed with the procedure developed by Damon (1977). This technique uses dilemmas in which contradictory interpersonal claims must be resolved in some fair way. The specific dilemmas used in the present study were: (a) A class has an art fair and must decide how to divide its earnings when class members have differing ideas about who is most deserving; (b) a teacher must decide if it is fair to give a poor student a free candy bar when other privileged students object because they have to buy their candy bars; and (c) who should receive the better grade, a student who is very smart but doesn't work or a student who is not as gifted but works diligently. Each dilemma was presented along with the standard probes as described in the Damon scoring manual (Gerson & Damon, 1975).

In brief, Damon's stage model enumerates six justice structures of progressively more adequate moral reasoning. At 0-A, the child's moral choice and moral reasoning are undifferentiated; when asked why the decision is fair, the child simply reasserts the decision. At 0-B, the child is able to justify the moral choice but does so on the basis of irrelevant considerations. The child's justification at 1-A provides a logical basis for the decision and generally emphasizes equality. The child at 1-B has decided that equality does not always mean justice; justice now involves reciprocity and the idea that there should be some comparability between what one contributes and what one receives. Only at 2-A and 2-B is the child able to conceptualize that there are multiple considerations that are relevant to reaching a just decision. At 2-A, the child sees the multiplicity of acceptable reasons but has no way of articulating and coordinating them. The 2-B child is able to integrate competing moral claims and is not overwhelmed as is the 2-A child.

Each subject's protocol was scored by matching the child's reasoning with the criterion judgments enumerated in the scoring manual. In this way, a stage score for each child was computed for each of the three dilemma stories. Stage scores were converted using the following procedure: Stage 0-A = 0, 0-B = 50, 1-A = 100, 1-B = 150, 2-A = 200, and 2-B = 250. These scores were in turn combined to provide a single measure of distributive justice reasoning for each subject.

*Prosocial moral reasoning* was assessed with a procedure developed by Eisenberg-Berg (1979) with only slight modifications. Each subject received three illustrated dilemmas in which the actor's own wishes and concerns were in

conflict with the well-being of a needy other. The specific themes of the dilemmas were: (a) a child who is asked to help an injured youngster by going for assistance, thereby missing a birthday party; (b) a child who considers aiding a child being attacked by a bully, thereby jeopardizing his or her own personal safety; and (c) a teenager who is asked to help crippled children strengthen their legs through swimming, which would result in relinquishing the chance to win a cash prize in a swimming meet. With each story the subject was queried as to what the actor should do and why.

Subjects' responses for each dilemma were coded with the highly detailed system of 23 moral consideration categories developed by Eisenberg-Berg (1979). These categories are subsumed under the following headings: (1) obsessive and/or magical view of authority and/or punishments—reference to condemnation or punishment; (2) hedonistic reasoning—personal gain as justification; (3) nonhedonistic pragmatism—appeal to prudential reasons; (4) needs-oriented reasoning—appeal to interests of persons other than self; (5) concern with humanness—orientation to the fact that the other is a living person; (6) stereotyped reasoning—appeal to platitudes; (7) approval-oriented reasoning—gaining and maintaining friends as justification; (8) overt empathic orientation—taking the perspective of the other and/or expressing sympathetic concern; (9) internalized affect—concern with feeling good or bad due to the consequences of one's actions; (10) other abstract and/or internalized reasoning—orientation to internalized duty and/or concern for societal welfare. Each of the 23 moral consideration categories were scored as present or absent on each dilemma and then were weighted according to the procedure suggested by Eisenberg, Lennon, and Roth (1983).<sup>1</sup> These results were then pooled across dilemmas and were used to derive the composite score of prosocial moral reasoning.

*Prohibition-oriented moral reasoning* was assessed with a procedure adapted from Turiel and his colleagues (Davidson et al., 1983). Each child received the following dilemmas: (a) A boy takes another child's toy and then pretends that he doesn't know what happened to it; (b) a bully, rather than taking turns on the slide, shoves his way to the front of the line. The interview began by asking the child if the above acts were wrong and, if so, why. There then followed a series of probes in which the offender is told to commit the act by his teacher. Would

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<sup>1</sup>These scores were then weighted according to the Eisenberg et al. (1983) procedure. Specifically, hedonistic (2a), direct reciprocity (2b), and affectional relationship (2c) were weighted 1. Concern for others' physical needs (4a) and concern for others' psychological needs (4b) were weighted 2. Stereotypes of good/bad persons (6a), stereotypes of majority behavior (6b), stereotypes of others' roles (6c), and approval/interpersonal orientation (7) were weighted 3. Sympathetic (8a), role taking (8b), positive affect/simple or related to consequences (9a), positive affect regarding self-respect (9b), internalized negative affect over consequences of behavior (9c), internalized negative affect due to loss of self-respect (9d), internalized value orientation (10a), concern with the rights of others (10b), generalized reciprocity (10c), and concern with the condition of society (10d) were weighted 4.

the act still be wrong and why? If the school rules prohibiting this act were changed, would it then be okay?

Whenever the subject indicated that the act would be wrong, he or she was asked to indicate why. These rationales were then analyzed with the following justification categories: (1) No Answer—no rationale articulated; (2) Stereotypic Reasoning—appeal to platitudes; (3) Rule Restatement—restatement of violation; (4) Appeal to Authority—reference to the disapproval of important others; (5) Punishment Avoidance—reference to unpleasant consequences; (6) Prudential Reasons—appeal to personal choice; (7) Social Coordination—appeal to the need for societal organization; (8) Others' Welfare—appeal to the interests of persons other than self; (9) Appeal to Fairness—reference to maintaining a balance of rights; (10) Obligation—appeal to duty or personal conscience.

Each dilemma was scored by examining the child's reasoning for the presence of the above rationales. Only the primary justification was scored per probe on each dilemma. These scores were then combined in order to provide an index of the extent to which each of the justification categories were used by the subject. More specifically, the composite score was derived by summing the child's appeals to the welfare of others, fairness, and obligation minus rationales based on stereotypic thought, appeals to authority, punishment avoidance, and no answer. Each subject's score also includes a constant of 100. This procedure reflects the age trends reported by Davidson et al. (1983) in which they interviewed 6- to 10-year-olds with identical dilemmas.

Since the presumed link between television viewing and moral reasoning assumes that the content of specific programs influences the child's reasoning, it was important to have multiple measures of viewing which would reflect television's varied content. Hence, television viewing was assessed by a procedure developed by Huston and Wright (1984). Each mother was provided television viewing diaries and was asked to record her youngster's viewing from 6 a.m. to 2 a.m. for each day of a 2-week period. For each 15-min interval that television was viewed, a channel number and a program name were recorded. Diary entries were analyzed with a procedure that grouped programs on the following bases: (a) intended audience (child or general); (b) information purpose (yes or no); (c) animation (all vs. part or none); and (d) program type (drama, comedy, etc.). This resulted in 22 viewing categories which were then collapsed to form the following eight types of television viewing: (1) Child—Informative; (2) Child—Animated Noninformative; (3) Child—Other Noninformative; (4) Adult—Informational; (5) Adult—Comedy; (6) Adult—Drama; (7) Adult—Action Adventure; and (8) Adult—Miscellaneous.

The *Home Interview Questionnaire* assessed family demographic characteristics, including level of parental education and current employment status. The mother was asked to assess how much television her youngster watched, what the child's favorite programs were, and in general how much her son or daughter enjoyed television. Mothers also indicated on a 5-point scale (never to

very often) how often they set limits on what programs their child could watch (TV Regulation). Among other questions asked were: Does the family watch programs together? and, Is your child encouraged to watch specific programs?

### Interrater Reliability

In order to assess the interrater reliability of the scoring of the moral judgment measures, 21 protocols were randomly chosen for each of the three measures of moral reasoning. Independent scorings of the distributive justice, prosocial moral reasoning, and prohibition-oriented moral reasoning measures yielded acceptable Pearson product correlations of .79, .78, and .92, respectively.

## RESULTS

### Moral Reasoning

The means and standard deviations of the moral judgment measures are listed in Table 1. The ranges of moral reasoning scores were 50 to 192 for distributive justice, 59 to 83 for prosocial, and 95 to 103 for prohibition-oriented reasoning. There were no significant sex differences on any of the moral judgment measures (distributive justice,  $t = 1.49$ , n.s.; prohibition-oriented,  $t < 0.1$ ; prosocial,  $t < 0.1$ ). As expected, each of the three measures of moral reasoning were substantially correlated with subjects' age. Distributive justice and prohibition-oriented reasoning had correlations of .57 with age (both significant at the .001 level), whereas prosocial moral reasoning's correlation was .47,  $p < .001$ . Likewise, the three measures of moral judgment were intercorrelated. The specific correlations were as follows: .41 ( $p < .001$ ) for distributive justice and prohibition-

**TABLE 1**  
Means and Standard Deviations of Moral Judgment Variables  
by Grade

	Distributive Justice	Prohibition- Oriented	Prosocial
Kindergarten			
<i>M</i>	106.94	98.50	66.08
<i>SD</i>	24.41	1.59	4.60
Second Grade			
<i>M</i>	115.63	100.28	66.33
<i>SD</i>	25.69	1.52	4.93
Fourth Grade			
<i>M</i>	150.00	100.90	72.67
<i>SD</i>	27.25	1.02	5.23
All Grades			
<i>M</i>	124.19	99.89	68.36
<i>SD</i>	31.59	1.72	5.76



**TABLE 2**  
**Mean Number of Hours of Television Viewed per Week by Program Type and Grade**

	Grade			
	K M(SD)	2 M(SD)	4 M(SD)	All M(SD)
Child—Informative	3.30(2.63)	0.50(0.50)	0.20(0.42)	1.30(2.09)
Child—Animated	3.50(1.82)	4.10(2.50)	2.80(2.54)	3.50(2.34)
Child—Noninformative	0.60(0.54)	0.90(1.12)	0.50(0.77)	0.70(0.85)
Adult—Informational	1.70(2.69)	1.30(1.50)	1.20(1.34)	1.40(1.93)
Adult—Drama	0.90(0.82)	1.30(1.28)	1.40(1.54)	1.20(1.25)
Adult—Action Adventure	1.50(1.69)	1.90(1.92)	1.50(1.40)	1.60(1.67)
Adult—Comedy	2.00(2.14)	3.00(2.14)	3.10(2.44)	2.70(2.28)
Adult—Miscellaneous	1.20(1.18)	1.30(0.96)	1.00(1.29)	1.20(1.13)
Total Viewing	14.70(6.47)	14.30(5.61)	11.70(4.69)	13.60(5.72)

oriented reasoning; .27 ( $p < .05$ ) for distributive justice and prosocial moral reasoning; and .37 ( $p < .001$ ) for prohibition-oriented and prosocial moral reasoning. With age partialled out, the correlations between the moral judgment measures were .13 for distributive justice and prohibition-oriented reasoning, .14 for prohibition-oriented and prosocial moral reasoning, and .00 for distributive justice and prosocial moral reasoning. None of the correlations with age partialled out was statistically significant.

### Television Viewing

As indicated in Table 2, the typical subject watched slightly more than 13 hours of television per week. Total television viewing time was comparable for boys and girls ( $t = 1.38$ , n.s.), with older subjects watching only slightly less television than younger subjects,  $F(2, 69) = 2.08$ , n.s.). Girls, however, watched substantially more Adult—Comedy,  $t = 2.83$ ,  $p < .01$ , and Adult—Drama programming,  $t = 1.77$ ,  $p < .08$ . Across ages, the major differences in program viewing was the highly significant difference in Child—Informative viewing,  $F(2, 69) = 28.73$ ,  $p < .001$ . Among kindergartners, there was an average of more than 3½ hours per week which fell to ½ hour at the second-grade level. In addition, Child—Animated Noninformative viewing was high across the three age levels as was Adult—Comedy. In view of the infrequent viewing of Child—Other Noninformative programming and Child—Informative by second and fourth graders, these viewing categories were omitted from further analysis.

### Relation of Viewing to Moral Judgment

Zero-order correlations of television viewing and the moral judgment measures are presented in Table 3. The strongest correlations between viewing and moral judgment occurred at the kindergarten level. This was particularly true of dis-

**TABLE 3**  
**Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficients**  
**Between Television Viewing and Moral Reasoning**

	Grade			
	K	2	4	All <sup>a</sup>
<b>Child—Informative</b>				
Distributive justice	-.38			
Prohibition-oriented	-.14			
Prosocial	-.06			
<b>Child—Animated</b>				
Distributive justice	-.20	.28	.09	.03
Prohibition-oriented	-.15	.03	.27	.08
Prosocial	.06	-.19	-.09	-.14
<b>Adult—Informational</b>				
Distributive justice	-.15	.01	.05	-.04
Prohibition-oriented	-.35	.25	.14	-.06
Prosocial	-.36	.05	.43*	.01
<b>Adult—Drama</b>				
Distributive justice	-.13	-.23	-.09	-.16
Prohibition-oriented	-.01	.02	-.33	-.07
Prosocial	-.18	-.21	-.36	-.28*
<b>Adult—Action Adventure</b>				
Distributive justice	-.30	-.14	.24	-.09
Prohibition-oriented	-.27	.09	.00	-.05
Prosocial	.08	.09	-.54**	-.13
<b>Adult—Comedy</b>				
Distributive justice	-.44*	-.20	-.23	-.31**
Prohibition-oriented	-.16	.02	.12	.00
Prosocial	-.18	.43*	.15	-.01
<b>Adult—Miscellaneous</b>				
Distributive justice	-.50**	-.11	-.14	-.27*
Prohibition-oriented	-.43*	-.07	-.07	-.18
Prosocial	-.12	.18	.16	.04
<b>Total Viewing</b>				
Distributive justice	-.58**	-.12	-.05	-.28*
Prohibition-oriented	-.49*	.16	.15	-.09
Prosocial	-.24	.05	-.26	-.18

<sup>a</sup>Partial correlations with age controlled.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

tributive justice and prohibition-oriented moral reasoning. With respect to the former, Adult—Miscellaneous,  $r = -.50$ ,  $p < .01$ , Adult—Comedy,  $r = -.44$ ,  $p < .05$ , and total viewing,  $r = -.58$ ,  $p < .01$ , had substantial negative correlations. The strongest correlates of prohibition-oriented reasoning were Adult—Miscellaneous,  $r = -.43$ ,  $p < .05$ , and total viewing,  $r = -.49$ ,  $p < .05$ .

.05. While prosocial moral reasoning and television viewing were not significantly correlated, the associations were predominantly negative.

Among second and fourth graders, the correlations indicated little relationship between television diet and moral judgment. However, among second graders, Adult—Comedy viewing was positively related to prosocial reasoning,  $r = .43$ ,  $p < .05$ . At the fourth-grade level, prosocial moral reasoning was negatively related to Adult—Action Adventure,  $r = -.54$ ,  $p < .01$ , and positively related to Adult—Informational viewing,  $r = .43$ ,  $p < .05$ .

In order to further assess the relationship of television viewing to moral reasoning, a series of multiple-regression analyses were undertaken. Although none of the home interview variables was consistently correlated with each of the moral reasoning measures, social class as measured by the Duncan scale and parental television regulation were significant predictors of distributive justice and prohibition-oriented reasoning, respectively. Hence, for each of the three moral judgment measures, a multiple regression was computed in which age, social class, and parental television regulation variables were first entered. Initial analyses used total viewing as the predictor variable and were then followed by analyses using specific program category variables.

As indicated in Table 4, after controlling for age, social class, and television regulation, total viewing was marginally significant in predicting distributive justice and prosocial moral reasoning,  $t = -1.67$ ,  $p < .10$  and  $t = -1.79$ ,  $p < .09$ , respectively. Total viewing did not predict prohibition-oriented reasoning. Further analyses indicated that Adult—Comedy and Adult—Miscellaneous approached significance as predictor variables of distributive justice reasoning,  $t = -1.82$ ,  $p < .08$  and  $t = -1.78$ ,  $p < .08$ , respectively. Program viewing categories did not predict prohibition-oriented reasoning. With regard to prosocial reasoning, Adult—Drama viewing was found to be a significant predictor variable,  $t = -2.57$ ,  $p < .05$ .

## DISCUSSION

The findings of the present study do not provide strong support for those critics who have charged that television has an invidious effect on the moral judgment of children. An array of moral reasoning measures which assess varied domains of moral reasoning was used and yielded reasonably similar results. Among second graders and fourth graders there was little association between how much and what type of programming a child watched and how developmentally advanced he or she was in moral reasoning. Although it is not possible to confirm the null hypothesis, this is, nonetheless, an important finding given the widespread public concern that television may be corrupting children's moral reasoning.

However, among kindergartners, the negative relationship between most viewing categories and the three measures of moral judgment presents a definite pattern. Two interpretations seem most plausible. On the one hand, television viewing may have impaired the development of more advanced modes of reason-

TABLE 4

Multiple-Regression Analyses Predicting Moral Judgment From Television Viewing With Age, Social Class, and Television Regulation as Covariates

Criterion (Step) Predictor	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	$\beta$	Increment in Proportion of Variance	
				<i>t</i>	<i>p</i> (two tail)
<b>Distributive Justice</b>					
(1)Age	.60	.32	.57	5.79	.000
(2)Social class	.62	.39	.25	2.69	.009
(3)TV regulation	.62	.39	.04	0.92	n.s.
(4)Total Viewing	.64	.41	-.17	-1.67	.100
<b>Distributive Justice</b>					
(1)Age	.60	.32	.57	5.79	.000
(2)Social class	.62	.39	.25	2.69	.009
(3)TV regulation	.62	.39	.04	0.92	n.s.
(4) Adult—Comedy	.65	.42	-.19	-1.82	.074
<b>Distributive Justice</b>					
(1)Age	.60	.32	.57	5.79	.000
(2)Social class	.62	.39	.25	2.69	.009
(3)TV regulation	.62	.39	.04	0.92	n.s.
(4)Adult—Miscellaneous	.67	.44	-.17	-1.78	.080
<b>Prohibition-Oriented</b>					
(1)Age	.57	.33	.57	5.87	.000
(2)Social class	.58	.33	.04	0.40	n.s.
(3)TV regulation	.60	.36	.16	2.77	.007
(4)Total viewing	.60	.36	-.08	-0.64	n.s.
<b>Prohibition-Oriented</b>					
(1)Age	.57	.33	.57	5.87	.000
(2)Social class	.58	.33	.04	0.40	n.s.
(3)TV regulation	.60	.36	.16	2.77	.007
(4)Adult—Miscellaneous	.61	.38	-.14	-1.14	n.s.
<b>Prosocial</b>					
(1)Age	.47	.22	.47	4.45	.000
(2)Social class	.47	.23	-.06	-0.60	n.s.
(3)TV regulation	.48	.23	-.06	-0.17	n.s.
(4)Total viewing	.51	.26	-.20	-1.79	.079
<b>Prosocial</b>					
(1)Age	.47	.22	.47	4.45	.000
(2)Social class	.47	.23	-.06	-0.60	n.s.
(3)TV regulation	.48	.23	-.06	-0.17	n.s.
(4)Adult—Drama	.59	.34	-.27	-2.57	.012

ing about right and wrong. It is not difficult to generate persuasive examples of television heroes and heroines whose reflections are self-serving and lacking in ethical sensitivities. But on the other hand, it is also plausible that this negative association was due not to the effect of television viewing per se, but rather to the effect of third variables which are associated with television viewing. For example, in homes where the television is on much or most of the time, interaction among family members is likely curtailed. Such third-variable interpretations received indirect support in that Adult—Miscellaneous viewing, a reasonable measure of the extent to which the television is almost always on, was a strong negative correlate of mature moral reasoning among kindergartners. Similarly, the tendency for negative correlations across virtually all programming categories at the kindergarten level suggests that the content of the program is not crucial to the relationship. This interpretation was further supported by the tendency for total viewing time to be the strongest correlate in this relationship.

Particular note should be made of one positive finding. In recent years a variety of family-oriented situation comedies have appeared on television. On many episodes of these programs there have been obvious attempts to impart prosocial messages. Hence, it was encouraging to find a substantial correlation between Adult—Comedy viewing and prosocial moral reasoning among second graders. Second graders watch markedly more Adult—Comedy than kindergartners. Thus, it is quite plausible that the children's expanding viewing of situation comedies led them to new insights as to why it is important to help people in need. This finding highlights the considerable, yet hardly untapped, potential that television has for promoting growth in moral reasoning.

Far less encouraging was the finding of the high negative correlation between Adult—Action Adventure and prosocial moral reasoning among fourth graders. Although viewing of this type of programming peaked among second graders, the strong negative association did not emerge until later. Perhaps the effect is most pronounced for those fourth graders who continue with this type of viewing when many of their classmates have begun to lose interest.

One final caveat. It would be unfortunate if on the basis of this study it was concluded that the television-and-morality issue needs no further investigation. It is important to note that the children studied came from homes of well-educated parents. Seventy-two percent of the fathers had college degrees, and no parent had less than a high school education. In fact, more than 10% of the fathers, as well as one mother, had graduate or professional degrees. Furthermore, many of these parents expressed strong concern about potential adverse consequences of watching too much television. Almost all mothers indicated that they monitored what type of television their children watched. Furthermore, in view of the privileged nature of participating families, the children had many opportunities for recreation other than television. This was evidenced by the fact that subjects watched nearly 7 hours a week less television than most children (Comstock, Chafee, Katzman, McCombs, & Roberts, 1978).

Consequently, it is important that this line of research continue with a more representative population of children. A stronger test of the critics' concerns would be achieved with children of parents less sensitized to the issue and who monitor their children's viewing less. It is also important that future studies use children who watch a more typical amount of television. Such extensions will be difficult because of the necessary involvement of parents in keeping television diaries. A paradox confronting researchers is that willingness to participate by keeping diaries self-selects families most sensitized to the possible negative impact of television. Hence, willingness to participate and heightened concern appear to be correlated. Future researchers would do well to give high priority to disentangling this artifact.

Ideally, researchers should consider a longitudinal design which would provide a more powerful test of any cumulative negative impact. Sequel investigations should also consider a lower social class population and attempt to devise a more fine-grained measure of television diet. For example, perhaps an array of situational comedies with frequent prosocial themes could be analyzed for possible linkage to advanced prosocial reasoning. Also of importance would be the addition of an independent cognitive measure in order to explore the extent to which television influences moral reasoning through a more general impact on cognition. Finally, it would be advantageous to extend the age of the subject population in order to provide a more complete test of critics' concerns.

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