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Mapping Parental Mediation and Making Connections with Media Literacy

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Kelly Mendoza

Abstract

The recent literature on parental mediation, parent intervention of media use and content with their kids, is reviewed. Three types of parental mediation are defined and mapped out, research on the types of factors that influence mediation, the effects of mediation behavior on children's attitudes and behavior, and mediation in different family communication styles is synthesized. Then, an overview and critique of mediation research methods is offered, followed by suggestions for future research. Finally, it is recommended that parental mediation partner with media literacy, and a re-mapping of three types of mediation through a media literacy inquiry model is proposed.

Key words: *parental mediation, coviewing, restrictive mediation, active mediation, media literacy*

Mapping Parental Mediation and Making Connections with Media Literacy

Living in a media-saturated society, there is no doubt that individuals, particularly young people, are inundated with media messages in their day-to-day lives. According to the Kaiser Family Foundation (1999), in the United States children on average spend 5.5 hours per day outside of school work engaged with media (such as television, internet, radio, magazines, newspapers, CDs, DVDs, books, video games). Children are increasingly likely to have a television and computer in their bedrooms (Bovill & Livingstone, 2001; Livingstone, 2002). Children are entertained and informed by the media, but they also get information about social roles, ideals, and values from them. The media serve as a socializing agent, supplementing the influence of schools, parents, and religion in providing guidance about social roles, norms, attitudes, and behavior (Brown, 1998; Brown, Schaffer, Vargas, & Romocki, 2004; Galician, 2004a; Silverblatt, 2004; Thoman & Jolls, 2004). Children can learn negative behavior such as violence and aggression, negative body image and low self-esteem, poor nutrition habits, substance abuse, and also can learn positive behavior through prosocial messages, such as how to be physically and emotionally healthy, and how to be a good student, friend, and citizen. Parents, educators, media industry professionals, and government officials are concerned with the effects of media on the social, psychological, and physiological development of youth. Due to the increasing nature of media saturation in kids' lives, it is important that we consider mitigating the effects media has on them (for an overview of media effects on kids, see Strausburger & Wilson, 2002).

This paper explores parental mediation, a solution to intervene the negative effects of mediation between parents and children. Recent literature on mediation is reviewed and analyzed, and a partnership between mediation and media literacy is suggested, providing insights on how media literacy can strengthen parental mediation. Browne mentions the importance of parents in playing a part in their child's media use: "The majority of young children's experience of viewing television and videos takes place in their own homes and, therefore, parents are likely to help shape young children's perceptions of the status, value and enjoyment of televisual texts" (Browne, 1999, p. 31).

Various approaches to mitigate the negative effects of television and other media on youth can be seen in advocacy groups, government, media industry, and in the home. Developments of solutions in governmental regulation for the media's influence on youth range from the Children's Television Act of 1990, which requires the FCC to enforce

standards of educational programming on network television; and the Telecommunications Act of 1996, which required the implementation of the V-Chip and a television ratings system. However, government solutions have not been very successful. For instance, the V-Chip has been accused of failure due to poor design and marketing, and parent's lack of knowledge and confusion in how to use it and make sense of the TV ratings system (Hendershot, 2002; Kunkel, Farinola, Farrar, Donnerstein, Bielby, & Swarun, 2002). In the meantime, the media industry sees children and adolescents as a significant target market, and has developed more subtle and integrated forms of advertising such as advergaming (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2006) and product placement (Galician, 2004). The media industry also continues to perpetuate violence, unhealthy behaviors, and racial and gender stereotypes that may influence children's beliefs and attitudes (Children Now, 2001, 2003).

Due to the lack of success of governmental regulations and the media industry's self-regulation, there is a shift moving the responsibility of youth media intervention from government and media industry to parents and educators. Livingstone (2002), who conducted a large scale study of media use in European families, suggests that we are experiencing:

> A historical shift away from the assumption that the home can remain private, outside state regulation. Rather, as learning, work and public participation are increasingly conducted at home, facilitated by ICT [information and communication technologies], a detailed understanding of the nature and diversity of domestic practices surrounding media becomes critical to policy formation. Given the privacy and individuality accorded to the home and family, this requires, in turn, a shift in the form of regulation, from one primarily based on direct and enforced state intervention toward the management of a climate of social norms. (p. 241-242)

Whereas media regulation has been the main responsibility of the government and industry to restrict children's exposure, Livingstone suggests a different conceptualization of regulation that emphasizes social norms in order to positively help children navigate the media world. The shift should be from "negative restrictive orientation" to "positive regulation, defined in terms of goals rather than dangers, part of the current interest in defending public service (and the public good), [and] children's rights to cultural expression and consumer empowerment" (Livingstone, 2002, p. 243). Thus, parents are facing an increasing responsibility to regulate and intervene media for children in their homes, and parental mediation is one possible solution in the toolbox of media education.

Parental mediation is seen as one of the most effective ways in managing television's

influence on children (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2005). However, of all the research on media influence on children between 1950 and 1999, less than two percent looked at parental mediation or coviewing (Pecora, Murray, & Wartella, 2007). Recently, from 2000 to 2003, nearly seven percent of studies examined parental mediation or coviewing. Thus, it is worthy to review and synthesize recent scholarship in parental mediation to examine its practice and effectiveness as a potential tool of media intervention for youth.

This paper will start with a rationale for studying parental mediation, define and map out the three types of mediation, discuss factors that influence mediation, examine the effects of mediation behavior on children's attitudes and behavior, and connect mediation with family communication styles. Then, an overview and critique of mediation research methods is offered, followed by suggestions for future research. Finally, it is recommended that parental mediation partner with media literacy, and a re-mapping of three types of mediation through a media literacy inquiry model is proposed.

Mapping Parental Mediation

It is important to examine the recent literature (the past 15 years) in parental mediation and coviewing due to its increase, but also due to its scarcity and ambiguities in the research. We know very little about mediation, or why certain kids of mediation are associated with certain effects (Nathanson, 1999, 2001b). Parental mediation is of interest to those in the professions of communications, media production, psychology, education, and family services. The intervention of parents in their children's media consumption in the home may be a significant solution in the media's influence on children.

Browne (1999) surveyed and interviewed parents and children (aged 4-7) and found that it was not common for parents to watch television or videos with their children, with only 20% of children watching television with a parent on a regular basis. Children were influenced by their parents' attitudes and how parents regulated and talked about television and videos. Parents' program preferences and viewing behavior influenced their children's preferences and behavior.

Similarly, St. Peters, Fitch, Huston, Wright, and Eakins (1991) found that the viewing choices parents make help to determine young children's exposure to adult programming, contrary to stereotypes that a child's viewing choices are due to a lack of parental involvement. It was found that most children's programs were viewed without parents, while a majority of adult programs were watched with parents (St. Peters et al.).

When parents watch with their children, whether they say anything about the television content, and the nature of what they say can have an effect on their children. The American Academy of Pediatrics (2001), for instance, urges pediatricians to assess how parents talk to kids about television and impose viewing restrictions to protect children from the adverse effects of media. Parental mediation informs children about television's importance or lack of importance, how it should be used, and how much attention or disregard they should give to the material (Nathanson, 1999).

Defining Mediation

Parental mediation refers to parent intervention of media use and content with their kids. Warren (2001) defines mediation as "any strategy parents use to control, supervise, or interpret content" (p. 212). Mediation could include parents enforcing rules and limiting media use, viewing with their children and having a discussion about media content and techniques, or simply viewing together without any discussion. All of the mediation studies reviewed examine television mediation, with the exception of one that explored video game mediation (Nikken & Jansz, 2006). Thus, the following mediation definitions are related exclusively to television.

There is a lack of consensus for defining the term *mediation* that has contributed to ambiguities in the literature, and it is difficult to synthesize the literature because there are a variety of techniques labeled differently and measured in different ways (Nathanson, 2001; Potter, 2004). For instance, Weaver and Barbour (1992) examined what they called *restrictive mediation* (rules regarding children's television viewing), *evaluative mediation* (parents and children view purposively and discuss things such as advertising techniques, character motivations, value judgments, and the difference between reality and fantasy), and *unfocused mediation* (comments and statements made about television during or after viewing that are not purposive in analyzing the program). On the other hand, Warren (2001) claimed there are three distinct mediation strategies of *rulemaking* (limitations controlling the amount, time, or content of viewing), *discussion* (intentional interpretation of content in ways children can understand), and *coviewing* (watching television together without purposeful discussion). Another example is of different mediation types is in an analysis of randomized telephone survey data of Dutch parents' mediation behavior, which concluded three types of mediation that could reliably be measured: *restrictive mediation* (parents set rules for viewing or restrict viewing of certain content), *instructive mediation* (discussing certain aspects of

programs with children, during or after viewing), and *social coviewing* (adults and children watch television together, but do not discuss the program) (Valkenburg, Krcmar, Peeters, & Marseille, 1999). This study also found that *unfocused mediation*, which was originally identified by Bybee, Robinson and Turow (1982) as a style of an unstructured relaxed approach to television was proven "an invalid style of mediation, resulting from a misinterpretation of miscellaneous items that grouped together on a 'left over' principal components factor" and the authors urged future studies to ignore unfocused mediation and measure social coviewing instead (Valekenburg et al., p. 62).

One can see the ambiguities and differences in defining mediation, but the work of Nathanson (2002) and colleagues (Nathanson & Botta, 2003) provide the most clear and consistent definitions and labels of mediation. Mediation is categorized as either *coviewing*, *restrictive mediation*, or *active mediation* (*positive*, *negative*, or *neutral*). An explanation of these terms will be provided, followed by Table 1 (Types of Parental Mediation) that maps out the categories.

To begin, *coviewing* is simply watching television with children without any discussion (Nathanson, 1999). Coviewing has been argued as a deliberate, conscious form of mediation by some, and just coincidence or behavioral ritual without intention by others (Warren, Gerke, & Kelly, 2002).

Restrictive mediation is when parents exercise control through rules and limitations over their children's uses of television, including the types of programming and content they are allowed to watch.

Active mediation is talking with children about television, including commenting upon discussing programs and program content with children (Nathanson, 2002). Active mediation can either be positive, negative, or neutral. *Positive active mediation* refers to parents endorsing or praising the content, such as saying "I love this show" and "He sure is cool" (Nathanson & Botta, 2003, p. 309). *Negative active mediation* refers to parental judgment or critique of television messages, such as discussing the negative effects of advertising techniques or violent content (Fujioka & Austin, 2002). Examples include saying "That's not real" or "That show is wrong" (Nathanson & Botta, 2003, p. 208). Parents may use a combination of positive and negative active mediation, or they may exhibit *neutral active mediation*, which refers to "discussions that cannot be classified as either positive or negative in tone" (Nathanson, 2002, p. 308) such as "What do you think will happen next?" or "This

show is filmed in New York" (Nathanson & Botta, 2003, p. 309). As Fukioka and Austin (2002) note, some of these comments aren't purposive but are a part of daily conversation. However, a parent that lacks a purposive or critical tone, as in coviewing, may signal to children that they consider the content to be positive.

To connect to previously defined similar terms, *active mediation* is similar if not the same to the previously mentioned evaluative mediation (Weaver & Barbour, 1992), instructive mediation (Valkenburg et al., 1999) and discussion (Warren, 2001). *Restrictive mediation* is similar to Warren's (2001) rulemaking, and *coviewing* is similar to Weaver and Barbour's (1992) unfocused mediation or Valkenburg et al.'s (1999) social coviewing.

To make more sense of the differences between these definitions, Table 1 (below) maps out the three types of mediation. Each type is defined and related to similar concepts from other scholars. The chart includes descriptions of parent-child TV behavior, communication behavior, and examples of each kind of mediation behavior.

Table 1 *Types of Parental Mediation*

Types	**Co-viewing**	**Restrictive Mediation**	**Active Mediation**
Similar concepts	Social coviewing (Valkenburg et al., 1999) Unfocused mediation (Weaver & Barbour, 1992)	Rulemaking (Warren, 2001)	Instructive mediation (Valkenburg et al., 1999) Evaluative mediation (Weaver & Barbour, 1992) Discussion (Warren, 2001)
Definition	Parents and children watch TV together	Parents exercise control on the uses of TV by enforcing rules and limitations about programming, content, and amount	Parents talk with their children about TV programs and content Positive (endorsing or praising the content) Negative (parental judgment or critique of television messages) Neutral (cannot be classified as either positive or negative)
TV Behavior	Watch TV together	Do not necessarily watch TV together	Watch TV together and talk about it
Communication	No communication about TV content	Communication of rules and limitations for TV use	Communication about TV content while or after watching it
Examples	Parent watches	"You may watch	Positive

	TV program with child, talks about how his or her day went	one hour of TV after you finish your homework." "You are not allowed to watch PG-13 or R rated movies."	"I love this show." "He sure is cool." Negative "That's not real." "That show is wrong." Neutral "What do you think will happen next?" "This show is filmed in New York."

Mapping out the definitions in Table 1 attempts to provide a visual framework for mediation. The table also suggests that these definitions should be used in future research, because a weakness in mediation research is that it is not placed within an overarching theoretical framework (Nathanson, 1999). Although Table 1 is not a theoretical framework, it can provide a schema in defining, classifying mediation. Now that mediation has been defined and charted, research literature on the factors that predict mediation is covered, followed by attitudinal and behavioral effects of mediation on children.

Factors that Predict Mediation

Researchers are exploring parents' motivations for discussing media messages with their children and the results of their interactions (Fujioka & Austin, 2002). There are several factors that predict why parents mediate, including attitudes and beliefs, gender, accessibility, and family communication style. However, some of these predicting factors have discrepancies in the research. The strongest and most consistent predictive factor of mediation is parent attitude toward television and his or her belief about the negative effects of television (St. Peters et al., 1991; Valkenburg et al., 1999; Warren, 2001). Parents who believe that television may have negative effects such as violence, sex, and fear are more likely to mediate (Bybee et al., 1982; Valkenburg et al., 1999; Warren et al., 2002; Weaver & Barbour, 1992). Nathanson (2001b) found strong relationships between parental attitudes and the types of mediation parents used. Parents with negative attitudes toward television more often used negative active mediation and restrictive mediation, as "parents who enforce rules have an inherent dislike of violent content for themselves" (Nathanson, 2001b, p. 214). Parents who have a negative attitude toward video games were more likely to practice restrictive mediation (Nikken & Jansz, 2006). On the other hand, parents with positive attitudes toward television and those with more favorable attitudes toward violent television more often used coviewing (Austin, Bolls, Fujioka, & Engelbertson, 1999; Nathanson, 2001b),

and parents with more positive attitudes toward video games were more likely to practice active mediation and *coplaying* (similar to coviewing, it means playing videogames with children) (Nikken & Jansz, 2006). Pasquier (2001) suggests that new media have changed the traditional power relations between parents and children, where kids see media more positively than parents. Also, parents who were born with television may see it more positively than previous generations, and this may influence mediation behavior. Even though parental attitude is often overemphasized as the sole influence of mediation, we must consider other factors (Warren et al., 2002).

Parents are more likely to mediate with young children rather than older children (Austin, Jnaus, & Meneguelli, 1997; Chan & McNeal, 2003; Valkenburg et al., 1999; Weaver & Barbour 1992), and as a child gets older, there is less use of active mediation because parents and teens may clash in programming preferences (Allen, Burrell, & Timmerman, 2006). However, coviewing was found to increases with adolescents whereas restrictive mediation and active mediation declined (Pasquier, 2001; Warren et al., 2002). Children aged one through six receive the least amount of coviewing, but the most restrictive and instructive mediation, which may be due to the need for more harsh restrictions on content at earlier ages (St. Peters et al., 1991; Warren et al. 2002). However, contrary to Warren (2002), St. Peters et al. (1991) found that younger children coviewed programs more than did older children, and that coviewing decreases as a child gets older.

Moreover, the influence of parent demographics on mediation has mixed results. Mothers were found to engage in more mediation and co-viewing than fathers (Pasquier, 2001; Valkenburg et al., 1999; Warren, 2001), however, sometimes fathers engage in more coviewing than mothers (Weaver & Barbour, 1992). Parents were more likely to mediate for girls than for boys, (Nikken & Jansz, 2006; Weaver & Barbour, 1992). Browne (1999) found that mothers were more likely to watch television and videos with their daughters than sons, whereas fathers were likely to talk about and use the computer more with their sons more than daughters. These results show that mediation may depend on a parent's gender, a child's gender, and gender roles in the household.

In addition, parent education level and cultural differences influence mediation. Parents with a higher education level have more negative attitudes toward television violence, which could lead to an increase in deciding to use mediation, particularly restrictive mediation (Chan & McNeal, 2003; Fujioka & Austin, 2002). Cultural differences can play a role, as

Chan & McNeal (2003) found that most Chinese parents hold negative attitudes toward television and advertising and most often practice restrictive mediation. In spite of this, other studies found that parental mediation was unaffected by parental demographics such as sex, age, and level of education (Austin et al., 1997; Hoffner & Buchanan, 2002; Nathanson, 2002; Warren et al., 2002).

Another important factor in parental mediation is parent accessibility, engagement, and involvement (Warren, 2001; Warren et al., 2002). Mediation depends on the level of parental accessibility to children and engagement in shared activities, because "lack of 'together time' also means less enforcement of viewing rules" and whereas restrictions may carry over when the parent is gone, there is much less opportunity for active mediation or coviewing when a parent is less accessible (Warren et al., 2002, p. 105). Accessibility is related to socioeconomic status and gender. For example, a lower-income single mother may have to work a job that allows her less time with kids, which means less opportunity for mediation.

Family communication style, physical displays of affection, disciplinary style, and viewing preferences are also influential factors for mediation (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2005; Fujioka & Austin, 2002; Warren, 2001; Weaver & Barbour, 1992). One final factor that influences mediation is the number and location of televisions in the home and the way the family uses social space (Weaver & Barbour, 1992). Livingstone (2002) found that children increasingly have televisions and computers in their bedrooms, which could hinder mediation due to location and privacy. Thus, it can be discerned that parental attitude, gender, accessibility, and communication style are factors that work together to predict whether parents mediate and what type of mediation they use.

Effects of Mediation

Now that the various factors that influence mediation have been covered, the effects of mediation on children's attitudes and behaviors will be synthesized. (A review and critique of the measures of mediation will be offered in the next section on Methods, Measures, and Participants.)

Coviewing.

Coviewing, or simply watching television together with no discussion about it, has inconclusive results on attitude and behavioral change, but the latest research signals negative effects. Coviewing was found to occur more often than active mediation (Valkenburg et al., 1999), but other researchers found coviewing was rarely practiced (Dorr, Kovaric, &

Doubleday, 1989). Nonetheless, coviewing increases children's enjoyment of programs because children enjoy viewing television with their parents (Nathanson, 1999). Coviewing was also found to be a part of the political socialization process, although negative mediation had more of an impact (Austin & Pinkelton, 2001).

Parents who coview objectionable television (containing sex, violence, and drugs) with their adolescents encourage them to develop similar viewing habits (Nathanson, 2002). Coviewing may actually increase the likelihood of negative media effects such as aggression because parents lack of discussion serves as a sort of silent positive endorsement of the content (Nathanson 1999, 2001b). Nathanson (1999) explains, "when parents coview negative material and do not say anything that contradicts what is shown, children may interpret their parents' presence as a sign that they approve of the content and think TV viewing is a valuable, useful activity" (Nathanson, 1999, pg. 129), thus, "parents should be aware that the popular advice to 'watch television with your children' may produce undesirable effects if parents do not contradict the negative messages that are coviewed" (Nathanson, 2001b, p. 217). Nathanson has an important point: parents who simply coview do not display any signal that they disapprove of television content, amount of use, or nature of use. Without communication from parents, kids might get the wrong message.

Restrictive mediation.

Some studies have shown the choice of mediation style parents use most is restrictive mediation, where viewing rules are enforced (Warren, 2001; Weaver & Barbour, 1992), although there is mixed evidence on whether it is effective. Parents who use restrictive mediation watch less entertainment programming, and less television overall (St. Peters et al., 1991). Although parents report using restrictive mediation style, unfocused mediation (similar to coviewing), is probably used most frequently (Valkenbgurg et al., 1999; Weaver & Barbour, 1992). For instance, 49% of children in one study said they have no rules for television and 42% of those children say television is on most of the time in their household (Roberts et al., 1999). Perhaps parent and child self-reports of restrictive mediation yield different results.

Restrictive mediation has been found to be used more so with younger children, girls, in low-income families, and by parents who believe in negative media effects (Nikken & Jansz, 2006; Pasquier, 2001). One study found children eight years and older had no rules (Roberts et al., 1999). Restrictive mediation has been linked to outcomes of children watching

slightly less television (Allen et al., 2006), signaling parent disapproval of the content (Nathanson, 2001b). Restrictive mediation decreased children's generalized aggression and television-induced aggression (Nathanson, 1999).

Culture may influence whether a parent is restrictive or not. For instance, in China where children's media and advertising has little regulations, Chinese parents most often use restriction with a low level of coviewing and active mediation because they believe coercion and control is the most effective mediator (Chan & McNeal, 2003).

In a survey study of parents and children about media use in the home, Pasquier (2001) found that restriction is placed mostly on telephone and television, but control is inefficient because children who faced restrictions were as likely as other children to be heavy media users. Interviews with parents revealed that media restriction is difficult to implement. Interviews with children about parental control show that children know their parents' arguments about restriction very well and early on, and know ways to get around the rules. As Pasquier (2001) notes, children see media restriction as "doing forbidden things, or not following the rules exactly, is a way of showing that you are grown up" (p. 173), so "The game of media rules, for a child, is a way of learning more about the adult world, and the backstage of parents' lives" (p. 173). Varieties in the effectiveness of restrictive mediation was found by Nathanson (1999), in which very high or very low levels of restricted mediation were connected with more aggression of adolescents, but a moderate amount of restrictive mediation was related to less aggression. Adolescents whose parents used restrictive mediation had less positive attitudes about them, more positive attitudes toward the content, believed they were not trusted by their parents, and exhibited more positive attitudes toward viewing restricted content with friends (Nathanson, 2002). Thus, Nathanson (2002) warns that parents who use restrictive mediation may be doing more harm than good.

As in other areas of mediation, the effectiveness of restrictive mediation is debatable, and there is less research on restrictive mediation than coviewing and active mediation (Nathanson, 2002). How well restriction is carried out and whether parents enforce rules is questionable. Most parents who say they use restriction actually do little regulating and what they do to regulate is somewhat ineffective (St. Peters et al., 1991). In contrast, media control in the form of rules can be seen as a way for parents to communicate family morals to kids because it involves judgments about media and family life (Pasquier, 2001).

Active mediation.

Although there is little research on the impact of active mediation on attitudes and behavior of children, there are potential positive effects. Active mediation has been linked with positive outcomes. For instance, children of parents who use active mediation learn more from educational television content and experience positive outcomes on social behavior (Nathanson, 2002). Parents who use active mediation influenced their children to have more skepticism towards television news (Austin, 1993). Negative active mediation was shown to influence a child's political socialization because parents discussed politics with their children (Austin & Pinkelton, 2001). Negative active mediation and restriction decreased children's generalized aggression and television-induced aggression as "both active and restrictive mediation work by first influencing children's perceived importance of violent TV. Hence, active and restrictive mediation seem to socialize children into an orientation toward violent TV that makes them less vulnerable to its negative effects"(Nathanson, 1999, p. 137).

Nathanson and Botta (2003) surveyed parents and adolescents about at two stages of mediation about body image. They found the effects of active mediation on body image were related to the incidental content (content that is secondary to the main story, such as stereotypes or details) or the central content (content that emphasizes character development, plot, storyline) of television. Active mediation of the incidental content tended to increase an adolescent's negative body image, whereas active mediation of central content decreased an adolescent's negative body image. These results contradict popular belief that drawing attention to unreal, idealized body types would urge adolescents' to resist and question these body images. Instead, they note that drawing attention to thin images in the incidental content can lead to an unhealthy body image, regardless of a parent's good intentions through active mediation. Thus, active mediation may depend on the nature of the media content.

Active mediation has the potential to be more effective than coviewing or restriction. Parents of teenagers, for instance, can counteract violent or sexual content only if they "watch such content with teens *and explain their own views*. Clear explanations of parents' values and expectations—even if they are conservative ones—are useful and protective for teenagers" [emphasis mine] (Strausbruger & Wilson, 2002, p. 411). Even though parents were found more likely to ignore the content or change the channel than to discuss offensive content with their child (Austin, 1993), active mediation has been recommended to be the most effective form of parental television mediation (Nathanson, 1999). Talking with children seems a more important way to guide them rather than exercising restrictions on

viewing (Livingstone, 2002; Pasquier, 2001).

Family communication styles.

A few studies linked family communication styles with attitudes and practices of mediation. A family's television viewing style is noted as "central to the socialization of young children's television use" (St. Peters et al., 1991, p. 1422) and open communication between parents and children is significant in mediating children's television use (Warren, 2001).

The following studies draw on the concepts of *concept orientation*, a style of communication that emphasizes openness, negotiation, expressing individual ideas and opinions, and autonomy; and *socio-orientation* which emphasizes a more formal communication style highlighting obedience and harmony.

In a study of children ages eight through twelve and their parents, Buijzen and Valkenburg (2005) analyzed active and restrictive advertising mediation and the link with family consumer communication styles of concept-orientation and socio-orientation. Active mediation through concept-oriented communication was found to be more likely to reduce the effects of advertising than restrictive mediation and socio-oriented communication, which sought to protect children from advertising rather than empowering them to think critically for themselves.

Fujioka and Austin (2002) using the family communication patterns model (a model developed to investigate media socialization issues in the family), found that parents with an concept-oriented communication style were more likely to use discussion-based mediation (active mediation), whereas a parents with a socio-oriented style tend to reinforce TV messages. They found families who fell under a more socio-oriented model showed "an interest in telling their children to avoid controversy and arguments" (p. 644) and "positively associate with positive attitudes toward television and greater television use" (p. 647). Socio-oriented communication patterns resulted in restrictive mediation and coviewing, but less critical discussion. Families who fit under a concept-oriented communication style considered "communication a tool to convey and share views" (p. 644) and fostered "an open mode of parent-child communication such that the parents and children express and exchange their ideas freely and frequently" (p. 646-647). Concept-oriented parents used active mediation (positive and negative) and frequently discussed television overall. Thus, the authors conclude that socio-oriented parents have a greater need for media literacy

interventions.

Overall, the mediation literature is somewhat inconsistent in showing which types of mediation will positively effect children's attitudes and behavior, however, active mediation (of all types) seems to be the most promising type of mediation.

Measures, Methods, and Participants

The following section shares the patterns in the mediation literature's measures, methods, and participants, and discusses what is missing from mediation studies. Some studies used a one time self-report questionnaire on parent mediation attitudes and behavior, and others included both parent and child perspectives (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2005; Nathanson, 1999, 2001a, 2001b). Most studies examined young children (St. Peters et al., 1991) or tween children (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2005; Warren, 2001), whereas less looked at adolescents (Nathanson, 2001b). And others looked at a wide range of youth, from the very young to late adolescence (Fujioka & Austin, 2002; Hoffner & Buchanan, 2002; Nikken & Jansz, 2006; Warren et al., 2002). Due to the higher risk factors of youth in their tween and teenage years, more research is needed on mediation with these older age groups, including adults (Potter, 2004). It is problematic that restrictive mediation and active mediation decline as children get older, especially when tweens and adolescents are found to be particularly vulnerable to containing portrayals of sex, substance abuse, violence, and stereotypes. Thus, researchers should further examine adolescents and mediation, especially due to the fact that as children get older, parents use less mediation altogether.

With the exception of St. Peters' (1991) two year longitudinal study of viewing patterns and mediation patterns with young children, nearly all studies were not longitudinal and incorporated self-report data through written surveys (Chan & McNeal, 2003; Warren, 2001) or random telephone interviews of parents (Austin & Pinkleton, 2001; Fujioka & Austin, 2002; Hoffner & Buchanan, 2002; Warren, 2001; Warren et al., 2002). Self-report data from one group of studies relied on college students and their parents who were asked to think back to their media habits during high school (Nathanson 2001a, 2002 and Nathanson & Botta, 2003). While this data could provide a general idea of how participants look back on mediation and remember it, it is problematic because it involves participants to drawing from the past, potentially several years prior.

The reliance on surveys and questionnaires for self-report data is cost effective and fast, but can provide an inaccurate view of the actual mediation behavior that happens

(Weaver & Barbour, 1992). Problems with relying on self-report data include an underestimation or overestimation by parents and kids of their media use and mediation behavior. The most significant problem with self-report data, however, is social desirability bias. Browne (1999) found, when surveying and interviewing parents and children (ages 4-7) to explore the relationship between television viewing, parental involvement, and literacy development, that many parents were embarrassed to give the survey back. Browne speculates this is because they did not want to be criticized for using television as a babysitter (it was found that indeed, many did use it as a babysitter). Browne was surprised to find a 50% return rate of surveys for parents of daughters, who were extremely conscientious about returning the survey. Fujioka & Austin (2003) found that parents may underestimate their endorsement of television messages because it may not be seen as socially desirable.

Thus, a shift away from self-report data and toward observation in naturalistic settings (ideally in homes) is needed (Potter, 2004; St. Peters et al., 1991; Weaver & Barbour, 1992). Researchers could use participant observation or ethnography in homes to observe first hand the actual mediation that happens. Other means of capturing data is through parent and child mediation diaries, which St. Peters et al. (1991) used and which are encouraged by others (Warren et al., 2002; Weaver & Barbour, 1992). Another option is using discourse analysis to capture and analyze the utterances that parents and children speak while viewing. Finally, surveys cannot capture the exact information of what parents are actually saying to children during coviewing, restrictive mediation, and active mediation. To increase the validity of the research, longitudinal observations are needed (Potter, 2004).

The literature revealed patterns in the studies' participants. The majority of parents interviewed were white (Fujioka & Austin, 2002; St. Peters et al., 1991; Warren, 2001), mothers (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2005; Nathanson, 1999,2001b; Warren et al., 2002), married in nuclear families (St. Peters et al., 1991; Warren, 2001; Warren et al., 2002), with higher education and income (Fujioka & Austin, 2002; Nathanson, 2001b). These factors predict the likelihood that the mother will be able to stay home with her child and have more time, resources, and education for mediation. These factors also predict a higher likelihood that a parent will be accessible and engaged with mediation as compared to other parents who may have less education, are of a lower socioeconomic status, have to work when kids are home, and are less accessible overall. Warren et al. (2002) notes that for a variety of reasons including work and education, parents of a lower socioeconomic status are less accessible,

less involved, and often practice restrictive mediation but much less active mediation or coviewing. Based on these demographic patterns, mediation behavior must be examined in fathers, diverse populations, non-traditional families, and various socioeconomic situations.

Different measures for different types of mediation have been developed. Some scales and measures were expanded or adopted from Bybee et al.'s (1982) measurements of parental mediation of television viewing. A typology that measures social coviewing, restrictive mediation, and active mediation was developed by Valkenburg et al. (1999). A typology that measures positive and negative mediation, but not restrictive mediation or covieiwing, was developed by Austin et al. (1999). Austin (1993) developed a mediation scale including skepticism, positive active mediation and negative active mediation. These scales can provide different, contradictory results, as Nathanson (2001b) points out, that the discrepencies in mediation literature is due to the variety of ways mediation has been defined, conceptualized, and measured. Because there seems to be three types of mediation that have been labeled differently, future research must use the same definitions and terminology in order to make any progress, and perhaps should draw on the schema laid out in Table 1.

Future Research

Weaver and Barbour (1992), in their review of the parental mediation literature from a family systems perspective, found inconsistencies in the research. Nathanson (2001b) also notes that due to discrepancies it is difficult to generalize the causes and effects of mediation. The following suggestion, then, offers suggestions for areas of future research on parental mediation. Because the field of research on parental mediation is so fairly uncharted, many directions for future research exist in addition to the methods suggestions raised in the previous section. The following are eights suggestions of opportunities for future research in mediation.

Examine media other than TV.

An obvious opportunity is to explore mediation in other media besides television (Potter, 2004). Nikken and Jansz (2006) applied television mediation strategies to video game mediation, and found the three mediation types for television could also be applied to videogames. How parents mediate with radio, music (stereos, walkmans, Ipods), computers and internet (browsing, blogs, email), magazines, books, and media production (making music and videos, for instance) are open to examination. Research could explore how different media are mediated similarly or differently by parents, and how each medium may require

slight adjustments in mediation strategies. For instance, in a survey of European children and parents, Pasquier (2001) also found that European children are more likely to talk about television and less likely to talk about computers with their parents. Examining a variety of media is especially important in new media environments where children are spending a lot of time with other media than television (Livingstone & Bovill, 2001).

Intention of parents.

Another direction of research is exploring why parents choose the type of mediation they do, and whether this is conscious or unconsciously chosen (Allen et. al, 2006). If parents consciously choose active mediation, how is this different than those who use discussion without the intention of critique or judgment? Do parents need a critical intention for active mediation and restrictive mediation?

Communication patterns.

To better understand active and restrictive mediation, researchers need to find out exactly what parents are saying and how they are saying it (Nathanson & Botta, 2003). For instance, a parent's nonverbal communication can say a lot to a child, and it is unclear as to whether it counts as mediation, which is defined based on discussion or no discussion. What if, for instance, a parent shakes her head and crosses her arms while viewing—does that count as negative active mediation? Or what if a parent says, "That was a great show" in a sarcastic tone? Would that still count as positive active mediation? Additionally, it is worthy to explore how mediation begins—is it initiated by parents, or do children initiate mediation? The nuances of communication patterns will strengthen the ability to classify and measure mediation.

Social space.

The changing nature of media location in the home will affect how and whether mediation takes place. An increasing separation of viewing by family members is taking place due to the increase in media-rich bedrooms of youth (Livingstone, 2002). Thus, studies should look at media technology placement and usage within the spaces of the home and examine how this affects mediation.

Social patterns in the home.

Some research has shown mediation as related to a parent's demographics, for instance, the gender of the parent, gender of children, and social patterns of media use in the home. Mothers have been found to be more TV-oriented and mediate more with girls, and fathers to

be more computer-oriented and mediate more with boys (Pasquier, 2001). Thus, identity factors, social roles, and social patterns in the home should be examined to discover how they affect mediation.

Accessibility and engagement.

Warren (2001) calls for a more global assessment of parental involvement in terms of accessibility and engagement with children by examining parents' work hours and availability in order to facilitate any sort of mediation. Early trends from Warren's work indicate that accessibility and engagement, affected by socioeconomic status and education, are important factors in mediation, so this area deserves exploration.

Measuring mediation for specific content.

Nathanson (2001b) recommends that future research should focus on measuring the three types of active mediation and how they are correlated with television *content* so that specific mediation practices can be linked to specific media content (Nathanson, 2001b). For instance, perhaps negative active mediation is more effective for violent content, whereas positive active mediation could be more effective with pro-social content.

Taxonomy of mediation.

Potter (2004) suggests that mediation needs a taxonomy to organize various techniques so that researchers can design measures to test the effectiveness of different techniques and more easily design instruction for parents. A taxonomy would indicate which mediation techniques under which conditions work best for which children. A taxonomy would develop a model that could be connected to a higher degree of media literacy. Again, Table 1 provides an initial attempt to map out a taxonomy of mediation definitions.

The more we know about the predictors, behaviors, strategies, and effects of mediation in the home, the better we can inform parents, as well as media literacy educators and curriculum designers, how to effectively use mediation (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2005). In the next section, parental mediation is connected to a media literacy framework. The media literacy model, based on a framework of inquiry, will help to expand mediation, particularly active mediation, in refining the definitions and strategies parents can use. Table 1 will be revised and enhanced by drawing on media literacy's inquiry model.

Weaver and Barbour (1992) emphasize that the responsibility for viewing television lies with the parent, in which parents should assess their family communication, television behavior, and mediation habits, and make appropriate applications based on their assessment. Parents must also consider media literacy as an application of a type of mediation. In addition to the aforementioned opportunities for future research, mediation efforts can be expanded upon by drawing from media literacy.

Media literacy is the ability "to access, analyze, evaluate and communicate messages in a variety of forms" (Aufderheide, 1993, p. xx) where "a media literate person . . . can decode, analyze, and produce both print and electronic media" (Aufderheide, 1997, p. 79). Media literacy expands the concept of literacy to include reading and writing through new communication tools and offers new ways to learn through an "inquiry-based, process-oriented pedagogy" (Thoman & Jolls, 2004, p. 21). Most advocates agree that critical inquiry, the asking of questions about media texts, is the“center pole of the media literacy umbrella" (Hobbs, 1998, p. 27) and that critical inquiry is the foundation of media literacy (Alvermann & Hagood, 2000; Brown et al., 2004; Hobbs, 1998; Pailliotet, Semali, Rodenberg, Giles, & Macaul, 2000; Rogow, 2004; Silverblatt, 2004; Thoman & Jolls, 2004; Tyner, DATE). Although media literacy education is primarily a school-based approach, if parental mediation is to truly be effective, it must ally with media literacy.

There are several organizations that have targeted media literacy outreach efforts for parents. Children Now, the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the National Institute on Media and the Family (who’s mantra is “Watch what your Kids Watch”) urge parents to intervene with media in the home by setting media diets, controlling program content, and talking with kids. The Public Broadcasting Service (2006) has an excellent website for parents on children and media, and Common Sense Media (2006) offers a “Raising Media Savvy Kids” tool kit for parents.

Cable in the Classroom, the National PTA, and the National Cable & Telecommunications Association teamed together to create an ongoing outreach campaign and educational materials for parents and caregivers to intervene with media and teach media literacy to kids (Cable in the Classroom 2001, 2004). They created a website, www.controlyourtv.org as part of this campaign to emphasize *control* (education of V-chip and TV ratings system), *choice* (choosing suitable programs for kids), and *education* (teaching media literacy). The guides offer practical strategies parents can use in the home, depending

on the physical, cognitive, social/emotional, and linguistic developmental stages of their children. The guides urge parents to practice active mediation strategies such as "talk back to your TV," "Make TV watching an interactive family event," and "Watch it together, and use every opportunity to talk about what you are seeing and hearing" (Cable in the Classroom, 2001, p.8).

The latest campaign targeting parents is TV Boss, a cross-industry effort sponsored by the Ad Council (www.tvboss.org). Media management (not elimination, they emphasize), is the way parents should mediate television. In this campaign, although some of the solutions are to talk with kids about TV, control and restriction is emphasized as the main solution.

An example of a successful media literacy and mediation effort is by the British Film Institute Primary Education Working Group (2003), who discussed a case study of a "media box"—a box of media-related activities for young children parents could take home. Each media box contained a board game, role play items, puppets, a book, recipes, interactive writing suggestions, resources for making models / play dough, rhymes, and a video that would be stimulus for all of the activities. The box was passed around weekly to parents by nursery school staff. This was in conjunction with home visits by staff and parents keeping a media diary and record of what media their children liked. The "media box" was a success, and parents noted that their familiarity with the characters their children knew helped parents talk about them. At the same time, educators in the nursery school relied on the parents' diaries to determine what kids liked and what forms of literacy they were using so they could plan classroom lessons accordingly.

In these outreach efforts, although teaching media literacy skills is encouraged, concepts such as *parental mediation* are not used, nor the difference between coviewing, restrictive mediation, or active mediation discussed or how each can be effective or ineffective. Drawing from media literacy and a framework of inquiry, the three categories of parental mediation can be both expanded upon and refined in a restructured schema. Table 1, then, has been revised to be more detailed and includes a framework of media literacy to analyze the effectiveness of each mediation type. Below, Table 2 (Types of Parental Mediation via Media Literacy) is presented as an expansion and enhancement of Table 1 (Types of Mediation). It is followed by an explanation of what has changed from Table 1 and how this affects parental mediation.

Table 2 *Types of Parental Mediation via Media Literacy*

Types	**Co-viewing**	**Restrictive Mediation**	**Active Mediation**
Similar concepts	Social coviewing (Valkenburg et al., 1999) Unfocused mediation (Weaver & Barbour, 1992)	Rulemaking (Warren, 2001)	Instructive mediation (Valkenburg et al., 1999) Evaluative mediation (Weaver & Barbour, 1992) Discussion (Warren, 2001)
Definition	Parents and children watching, reading, and listening to media together *without talking about the media they are consuming*.	Parents exercise control on the uses of media by enforcing rules and limitations about programming, content, and amount, and type. *These restrictions must be enforced* (by parents, kids, or siblings)	Parents talk with their children about media c*ontent and production* while or after watching, reading, or listening *with the intention to highlight awareness by asking questions*. - Positive (endorsing or praising the content) - Negative (parental judgment or critique of television messages) - Neutral (cannot be classified as either positive or negative) -Positive and Negative (combining both strategies at once)
Media Behavior	Consume media together	May or may not consume media together	Consume media together, talk about it, and ask questions about it
Communication	No communication about media content, might include talk about other things	Communication of rules, limitations of media use, and rule enforcement	Communication about media content and production—*during or after consuming* it—*in ways that children can understand*
Strategies	Being together while consuming media	Give specifics Stick to the rules Offer alternatives	Ask questions Share opinions Highlight awareness
Examples	Parent watches TV program with child, goes on website together, or reads magazines together, but talks about non-	Parent says to child (and either child, sibling, or parent enforces the rule) "You may watch surf the web for	Parent says to child (with *intention and inquiry)*: Positive "This is a great website! *What catches your attention about it?*" "I like how the friends in this movie all get along…*How do you think friends should get along in*

	media related issues.	one hour 8:00-9:00pm, after you finish your homework." "After 9:00pm, it is family reading time. Any TV, videogame, cell phone, or Ipod use will be put on 'media arrest' until	*real life*? <u>Negative</u> "That video game has too much violence. *Who do you think made this game?*" "I do not like how the characters treat each other in this movie…*What could they have done differently?*"

(continued)

Types	**Co-viewing**	**Restrictive Mediation**	**Active Mediation**
Examples		Saturday." "You are not allowed to watch PG-13 or R rated movies. Instead, we can watch a movie that everyone can enjoy together."	<u>Neutral</u> "That person's wearing a Nike hat…*Is that product placement?*" "They are driving an awfully big truck. *Do you think that's real—why or why not?*" <u>Positive and Negative</u> "I like this show, but don't like all of the junk food ads. *What is missing from these ads*?" "I don't like how violent this videogame is, but it's fun to try to get points…*How could this game still be fun and have less violence?*"
Media Literacy?	No—lacks discussion, inquiry, awareness	Somewhat—restrictions and setting a "media diet" for kids is important, but does not tend to create critical awareness	Yes—discussing and asking questions about media with kids will promote awareness and critical thinking about the media.

Expanded Definitions

The definitions of the three mediation types have been expanded to be more specific.

For instance, coviewing has been expanded to include parents and children consuming media "without talking about the media they are consuming" to discern that although parents and kids may talk during coviewing, it has nothing to do with the media themselves. Restrictive mediation has been expanded to include limiting the "type" of media in addition to limiting amount and content, and also emphasizing that it only includes rules that are "enforced" by either parents, the kids themselves, or perhaps siblings or other family members. The definition of active mediation has been expanded to include parents talking to kids about media "content and production while or after watching, reading, or listening with the intention to highlight awareness by asking questions." This expansion to active mediation is important because it emphasizes both content and production (oftentimes the main focus is on content, and production techniques such as lighting, camera angle, editing style, sound effects, and music are forgotten). Also, the emphasis is not just on discussion, but on "parental intention to highlight awareness" which means incorporating media literacy skills of inquiry by asking questions about what parents and kids see, read, and hear. The communication category for active mediation is also emphasized to be understood "in ways that children can understand." This is important because, as mentioned earlier, nonverbal and verbal communication will be understood by children differently at different developmental stages. Parents must consider how the content of their speech, their nonverbal expressions, and the tone or intonations in their voice will influence their messages.

"Positive and Negative" Active Mediation

In the Definition category for active mediation, the option of "positive and negative" active mediation in addition to positive, negative, and neutral has been added. Under the earlier schema of active mediation; positive, negative, and neutral active mediation were classified. However, a new category combining positive and negative mediation acknowledges that parents may say have both positive and negative things to say at the same time; it does not have to be either/or.

New Strategies and Examples

A new box titled "Strategies" has been added to specify how each type of mediation could be approached more specifically. For example, strategies for restrictive mediation include "Give specifics," "Stick to the rules," and "Offer alternatives" strengthen the application of this approach. Under active mediation, it is recommended that parents "Ask questions," "Share Opinions," and "Highlight awareness" in order to emphasize media

literacy skills and inquiry rather than simply discussion without purpose. The "Examples" box offers scenarios that expand on Strategies by illustrating what parents can do or say under the revised inquiry model. For instance, notice that all of the active mediation examples include a question after each comment to emphasize that parents should forefront inquiry within mediation.

Degree of Media Literacy

Another new box titled "Media Literacy?" distinguishes whether each mediation strategy can be labeled as media literacy education. Coviewing is not considered media literacy because there is no discussion about media involved, and no awareness highlighted. Restrictive mediation is considered to connect with some aspects of media literacy, such as limiting media use and setting a "media diet," but the main focus of restrictive mediation is not critical inquiry or awareness. Active mediation is categorized as media literacy because it involves parents and kids intentionally asking questions in order to promote awareness and critical thought.

Parents express concern about the media's influence, but nonetheless still allow children to spend nearly 6.5 hours per day using media (Strasburger & Wilson, 2002). Parental mediation is an important niche of research that examines whether, why, and how parents are using mediation in the home. However, parents need to be educated in media literacy to see how it connects with their mediation strategies. The revised schema of parental mediation connected to media literacy highlights inquiry as a key component of mediation, and narrows down the three mediation types in a way that they can be better discerned, measured, and hypothesized as effective media intervention. Parents can inform media literacy advocates and curriculum developers how mediation is successful or unsuccessful in their homes, and urge a more dialogic approach between what types of mediation work for parents and what media literacy advocates recommend. If anything, education for parents needs to emphasize a major difference between watching television with kids and watching television with kids, talking about it, and asking questions about it.

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