

PERENNIAL PROBLEM:

What to do about Nurturing Human Development

CONTINUING PARENTING CONCERN:

Exploring the Realities of Being a Parent

RELATED CONCERN:

How Culture and Society Shape Parenting Behavior

DESIRED RESULTS FOR STUDENTS:

The students will understand how the influences of culture and society affect the development of parenting behaviors.

LEARNER OUTCOMES: Students will:

1. Explore the context of culture and society in relationship to the process of parenting.
2. Consider the desired results of developing effective parenting behaviors.
3. Develop culturally competent parenting skills
4. Distinguish how influences in society affect the development of parenting behaviors.
5. Analyze the consequences of action of different parenting behaviors on children's development.

SUPPORTING CONCEPTS:

- A. Historical Aspects in Child-rearing Practices.
- B. Culture, Development and Learning
- C. Influences in Society

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Historical Aspects in American Child-Rearing Practices: The history of children is often marginally addressed since children are relatively powerless and consequently are less visible than other social groups. Nevertheless, each generation of children has had to wrestle with the social, political, and economic circumstances of their own historical period.

One of the first groups to seriously reflect on children's basic nature and their development were the Puritans. Children were viewed as potential sinners with aggressive impulses that needed to be suppressed. Play was considered frivolous, and games involving peer interactions were discouraged. Children were considered deficient adults in training.

Colonial childhood life was widely diverse. Class, ethnicity, gender, geographic region, and religion defined the childhood experience.

Gradually, life changed for white children as the nation moved toward revolution. During this time period the maternal role in shaping children's behavior evolved. This was a novel concept since earlier childrearing literature had addressed fathers as the primary caregiver.

As America's middle class grew, so did the idea that children should be sheltered from work and the corruptions associated with adult life. This romantic version of childhood emphasized that children should be kept in school and the family home longer. Books and toys emerged reflecting a new emphasis on children. At the same time, the path to adulthood was less clear and American children were considered less disciplined.

At the end of the 19th century, an understanding of child development prompted scientific childrearing advice and the emergence of the modern concept of adolescence. Efforts were made to upgrade the maternal role by treating motherhood as a serious vocation. Theories of child development emphasized the notion of cognitive, emotional, and physiological stages. At the same time, a distinct teenage commercial market emerged. "Middle-class family life grew more democratic, affectionate, and child-centered and the school and the peer group became more significant in young people's lives" (Mintz, p.215). As theories of child development grew, parent's anxieties about parenting skills also grew.

Children's vulnerability was apparent during the Great Depression both economically and psychologically. When a teacher told a young girl to go home and eat, the child replied, "I can't. This is my sister's day to eat." Children suffered from malnutrition throughout the country. In coal mining regions, nine out of ten children were malnourished. Schools cut hours or closed doors entirely.

World War II disrupted families, producing shifts in family roles. Child labor laws became more permissive to allow children to fill war-time jobs at home. Young people were a valuable resource. The stage was set for fewer social restraints and a decline of parental authority.

The "golden years" of the 1950s are considered the era of child-centered family life. Defining characteristics of this time are high birth rates (baby boomers), suburban growth, postwar commercialization, and medical advances that eradicated many childhood diseases.

The years of the 1960s can be described as a time of social upheaval. The baby-boom children of the 1960s have been described as idealistic, rebellious, self-absorbed, materialistic, and narcissistic. This generation grew up in a world of contradictions. "Middle-class society valued independence but made the young dependent on adults to fulfill their needs; it stressed achievement but gave the young few avenues in which to achieve" (Mintz, p. 315). One of the most significant outcomes of the 1960s was the concept of children's rights.

Since the mid 1970s, parental anxieties have increased. Trends fueling these anxieties include the rapid rise in divorce, unmarried parenthood, single parenthood, working mothers, teen pregnancy, stranger abductions, child abuse, illicit drugs, juvenile crime and school violence. Economically it has become more difficult to become independent since the wages of non-college graduates has fallen sharply and the global economy has become more competitive. Child-rearing manuals crowd bookshelves warning parents that taking parenthood for granted could have disastrous results. These manuals convey a sense of urgency and reflect increased parental aspirations for their children's achievements. David Elkind described the tendency toward "hyper-parenting" as "over-scheduling and over-programming children's free time, placing excessive pressure on their offspring and depriving them of the opportunity for free play and hanging out" (Mintz, p. 343).

Late twentieth century parenting has been affected by the blurred boundaries from childhood to adolescence and from adolescence to adulthood. Mass culture has increased exposure of the young to adult realities – sexuality, violence, death. Consumerism has become a pervasive influence creating the desire to satisfy non-material needs through material sources. Children are marketed as little consumers from birth. Part-time teenage employment while also going to school has increased. Young people have been left to linger longer on the threshold of adulthood as it takes more and more education to become independent.

Cultural Development: Children develop a sense of who they are and what is important within the context of culture. Traditionally, it has been the child's family and cultural community that have the responsibility for the transmission of values, expectations, and ways of doing things, especially during the early years of life.

The United States has always had a great deal of cultural diversity, but in the past, children from cultures other than the dominant United States culture were able to develop at home during their early years, secure in the language and culture of their own families and homes. Not until the age of five or six did they usually encounter the challenges of being "different" from the mainstream, of learning another culture and, in the case of many immigrant families, another language.

For all who serve families from many diverse backgrounds, it is necessary to heighten cultural sensitivity, to acknowledge and respect cultural differences, and to learn to communicate and negotiate with all families. In this way we are working together to facilitate the optimal development of each child. Culture is a fundamental building block in the development of a child's identity.

Being aware of our own cultural influences and biases, and having an ability to utilize the strategies of acknowledging, asking, and negotiating is important to resolve cultural differences. Each individual needs to think about what culture means, become more aware of her or his own culture and establish ground rules that support discussions of culture. Children develop a sense of who they are and what is important within the context of culture. Parents play a significant role as transmitters of culture. They must respond in ways that support the healthy development of the children by providing a consistent home culture. Cultural sensitivity begins with an awareness of early experiences and their influence on our current values and behavior.

SocioEconomic Status: Society plays an integral role in parenting behaviors. One aspect of societal influences is that of poverty. A family is determined to be "poor" if their annual before-tax income is below the official poverty threshold set by the federal government. Someone who earns even one dollar more than the official poverty level is not counted as poor in the government statistics (Connolly & Davis, 1996). These individuals and families are the "working poor." Individuals and families who are under the federal poverty level and are "working poor" have low socioeconomic status (SES).

Media Influences: In our commitment to building critical thinking skills in our students – some of the future parents of our society – it is important for them to be empowered to examine the issue of media influences from several perspectives.

Is educational television really an oxymoron? How can students learn to identify, and ultimately advocate for quality programming for children, given that television is a fact of life in this global society? Can media become a springboard for learning, and a way to further open lines of communication between parents and children? What skills do our students need to practice to be able to take control of the media that we often feel controls us? This section allows students to examine how media has changed over the years, the upsides and downsides of it in the lives of children, and how to take an active role in its use.

Today's children are growing up in a media-saturated environment. Research by Phillip Conrad points out that by the time preschool children enter kindergarten they will have spent more time watching TV than a college student spends in four years of classes. (Conrad, p. 3) Although reading and writing literacy are taught as critical skills, media literacy is largely ignored in comparison. We are not taught how visual images affect us. Children are particularly vulnerable to the power of media. Media messages alter the way children see themselves and their world. Over-exposure to media can undermine children's healthy physical, intellectual, emotional, social, and moral development.

Children learn best when their play is a creation of their own experiences, abilities, and needs. In contrast, children exposed to excessive media tend to merely imitate what they have seen on the screen. Active multi-sensory play is vital to all aspects of a child's development. It helps children feel the sense of power that comes from actively figuring things out on their own. Additionally, multi-sensory play develops sensory acuteness. The senses provide the brain with information so brain functioning is enhanced.

Vocabulary is boosted only through "live" language. Janellen Huttenlocher of the University of Chicago studied the size of a toddler's vocabulary and found it is strongly correlated to how much a mother talks to the child, using different words and complex sentences.

Children grow best when they feel emotionally safe. TV violence can increase fear as images create a "violent world." Young children do not fully grasp the distinction between fantasy and reality. They may be frightened by something actually harmless. Two strong story elements that have a very strong emotional impact on young children are watching a program in which a child or animal is lost or in danger. Many forms of children's entertainment focus on these themes. As children get older, they become more sensitive to media news stories such as real disasters, kidnapping, accidents, and murder.

Media images often portray unrealistic body standards which can promote depression, eating disorders, and the use of steroids. Unhealthy gender stereotypes are encouraged through media sexual objectifying. Similarly, media sends strong messages about race, ethnicity and class.

Active physical activity actually changes brain chemistry, consequently decreasing depressive tendencies.

Children can be manipulated by media. Consider the impact of our consumer-driven culture as reflected through the media. "The average child is exposed to four hundred ads a day, which will add up to more than four million ads in a lifetime...children learn: that they are the most important person in the universe, that impulses should not be denied, that pain should not be tolerated and that the cure for any kind of pain is a product" (Pipher, p. 15).

Perhaps, most important of all, children need healthy interaction with adults, especially parents. Time spent in front of a screen reduces time for human interaction.

In countries such as Great Britain, Australia, and Canada, media literacy is already an essential part of the educational system. It is essential that parents and teachers protect, guide, and provide skills to utilize media's positive power. Media literacy can be described as "a driver's training program for the information highway" (DeGaetano & Bander, p. 32).

Consumer Culture: The United States is the most materialistic culture in the world. Our longings go far beyond basic necessities and even the occasional status symbol. Consumer credit has exploded while annually the number of Americans declaring bankruptcy is higher than the number of college graduates.

There is a growing awareness that consumer culture increasingly is targeting children. In fact, "kids and teens are now the epicenter of American consumer culture. They command the attention, creativity, and dollars of advertisers. Their tastes drive market trends...and shape brand strategies. Yet few adults recognize the magnitude of this shift and its consequences for the futures of our children and our culture" (Schor, p. 9). "Children's social worlds are increasingly constructed around consuming, as brands and products have come to determine who is 'in' or 'out,' who is 'hot' or 'not', who deserves to have friends, or social status" (Schor, p. 11).

Children are marketed from birth. "Research shows that children as young as six months can recognize brands, so marketers are aggressively going after this "zero-to-three demographic" of babies and toddlers in hopes of implanting cradle to grave devotion to their products" (Arnold, p. 38). Marketers spend billions of dollars targeting this most vulnerable audience. Brand loyalties are engrained while small brains are forming. Children are taught that who you are and what you are isn't much. Instead, you are what you own and happiness lies in buying things. This propaganda encourages adults and children to make bad decisions about time and money.

A marketing message is that we should be instantly gratified. This leads to impulse-control problems and feelings of entitlement. "You deserve a break today." "Have it your way." "Just do it." Efforts are trivialized. Another message is that products can solve complex human problems. And even when people reject the message of a particular ad, they may still buy the big message – buying products is important.

Philosopher Eileen Moody wrote that "the American dream has been rewritten in the language of advertisers" (Pipher, p. 94). To counteract this trend will require actively discussing these issues and taking steps that limit the activities and products to which children are exposed. It will involve helping children learn the attitudes and skills they need to try to solve their internal problems without relying on external objects. Together parents, teachers, and all people who care about the well-being of children must do their best to teach children to protect themselves from the influence of advertising and help them cope with the negative effects that advertising has on them" (Cantor, p. 43).

DIRECTED ACTIVITIES:

Supporting Concept A: Historical Aspects in Child-Rearing Practices

1. **"Reflection"**: Ask students to reflect on their childhood.

Remember when you:

- Made mud pies
- Caught grasshoppers or insects to keep in a jar
- Had a favorite blanket
- Built a dam out of rocks in rivers in creeks
- Made a tent house with blankets or chairs
- Gave a sister, brother, a playmate, or yourself a "haircut"
- Sold lemonade at a stand
- Had a habit of sucking your thumb or fingers
- Had a favorite stuffed animal that you took everywhere

2. **"Quotes"**: Share the following quotes with students:

"Childhood is a blissful time of play and fantasizing, or uninhibited sensual delight."
(Claire Booth Luce)

"In all of our efforts to provide advantages we have actually produced the busiest, most competitive, highly pressured and over-organized generation of youngsters in our history."
(Eda J. LeShan)

Ask students:

- With which of these quotes do you agree the most?
- Why?

3. **“How Childhood has Changed”**: Introduce the following activities with the following statement:
“Today, we are going to compare childhood in the past with childhood of the present. Understanding how children have lived in the past is a hard thing to study since stories of children are absent from the written record and yet children have always existed.”

Ask students, “How do you think your childhood would be different if you had been born 100 years ago?” Allow students some time to reflect and share ideas.

Show a collection of pictures of children in the past (working, leisure, family life, etc.).

Share some thoughts regarding children of the past:

“Before the 20th century, children were seen as *miniature adults* – nothing was important or unusual about these years.”

“Evidence paints a sad story of cruelty to children throughout the ages. This brutality to children was possibly part of the generalized social cruelty of the time. Both adults and children, nobility and poor were subjected to widespread abandonment, punishment, and mutilation for what appears to us as minor offenses.”

“Before the 20th century, parents could not hope to raise every child born to them. As late as the 17th century, people could not allow themselves to become too attached to something that was regarded as a possible loss.”

“The ideas of *childhood* as a distinct time of life, separate from adulthood, evolved first for the upper class. Sons of middle/upper-class were the first children to be separated from working activities and sent to school to undergo a long training in preparation for their adult working lives.”

(Suransky, Polakow, Valerie, *The Erosion of Childhood*, 1982, p. 7)

Using “Compare and Contrast” form (SM-1), ask students to compare childhood of the past to childhood in the present. They are to compare and contrast work, play, education, health, dress, and parenting attitudes. (*The Developing Child*, Glencoe/McGraw-Hill, 2000, pp. 26-28.)

Journal Assignment: Upon completion of the activity ask students to respond to the following prompts:

- I found out...
- I was surprised...
- I am concerned...
- It was no surprise...
- I want to use this information in the following way(s)...

TEACHER PREPARATION:

1. Think about your own background. What characteristics of that cultural background affected the way you were treated? What were the expectations your parents had for you? What were some societal trends taking place during your childhood?
2. How do students in your class feel about their cultural heritage? Can they identify with a certain ethnic group? With certain religious groups? What are the changes taking place in society today which will affect their behaviors as future parents?

Note: TM in the activities refers to transparency master and SM refers to student master.

Supporting Concept B: Culture, Development, and Learning

4. **“What is Culture?”**: Begin the lesson by pointing out that diversity is a reality in the United States today. In some states, such as California, people of European ancestry who have traditionally been the dominant group comprised less than 50% of the population in the year 2000. As a nation, we need to acknowledge the diversity around us and to understand its impact on our lives and the lives of the children.

Begin the discussion of culture with “What is Culture?” (SM-2, TM-1). Review the definition and components of culture with the group. Ask for examples of components. Read the quote at the beginning of the handout to the class. Allow time for reflecting on the quote, and ask for feelings, thoughts, and reactions. Ask for comments from the group about what they think should happen to support a child’s sense of culture. Write their suggestions down on the board or easel paper.

5. **“Ground Rules”**: Tell the class that the goal of the next set of lessons is to enhance their ability to be culturally sensitive. This process begins with an awareness of one’s own values. Acknowledge that becoming aware of personal values and personal biases can feel like a very risky undertaking. Establishing ground rules for discussions will help participants know what is acceptable in class and how to protect yourself and others from loss of dignity and self-respect. Ask for suggestions for ground rules and write the ideas on the board or easel paper. Be sure to include the following topics:

- Respect confidentiality
- Ways to inform others about one’s feeling of being stereotyped, prejudged, and discounted
- Ways to respond to communications of strong feeling about differences

Use examples to make these points clear. After the discussion, write down ground rules that the class has established. Write them on easel paper and post them as a reminder for these discussions.

6. **“Defining a Cultural Context”**: The goal of this activity is to identify some of the cultural values of their early years, to define their own cultural context. Hand out “Defining a Cultural Context” (SM-3). Have students complete the handout based on the household of their childhood. Then divide into smaller groups of 3 to 4 members. Ask each group to select a recorder for discussing the following points:

- What are similarities and differences among group members?
- Identify the values underlying particular practices (e.g. valuing the individual vs. the group, independence vs. conformity, a parent’s responsibility vs. a child’s).

- Reflect on how these values influence one’s present beliefs and actions.
- Do some group members come from more than one culture?

Following these group discussions, ask each group to report on their discussion to the larger group. Ask them to think about the key people who were instrumental in conveying these ideas to them. Reinforce the idea that parents play a key role in transmitting attitudes, values and practices.

7. “Things in My Culture”: Hand out “Things in My Culture” (SM-4), and have students complete it using the culture of childhood as reference. Ask students to exchange their completed papers with another student. Ask students:

- What do these answers tell you about this person?
- Can you tell what she or he considers to be important?
- What might be some of this person’s ideas about children?

Point out that artifacts, celebrations, and food are products of culture and give little information about values, beliefs, or ways of doing things on a daily basis. Culture represents an “idea system” that sets rules for living. Frequently differences in cultures are addressed by looking at cultural products in the context of the dominant culture so that they are regarded as “quaint” or “exotic.” Such superficial knowledge can easily lead to false assumptions or stereotypes. For example, hamburgers are a popular food in the United States. An assumption might be that all U.S. citizens are meat eaters.

8. Journal Activity: Write down an early experience that made them aware that they were “different,” perhaps in the way they dressed, the way they did something, their use of language, or the way they looked. What feelings did the awareness of “difference” evoke? What did they do to ease the feelings of discomfort? Did another person’s intervention help?

9. Guided Reflection: Young children are especially vulnerable to “differences” because they need familiarity to feel secure. Have students sit in a comfortable position, close their eyes, and listen to the following:

Imagine that you are a young toddler just beginning to walk. The kitchen is one of your favorite places to explore. In your mind’s eye, see the stove, the refrigerator, and the floor. Now imagine a familiar person in the kitchen. Think about the voice, the sound of the speech, the color of the hair, the feel of their skin and their clothes, when that person picks you up, the smell of the food being cooked.

Now imagine you, the same toddler, in another setting - a child development playroom. A stranger is with you. The hair and skin are of another color, that person speaks with high-pitched sounds that are very strange to you. You desperately would like to see something familiar, even if it is a piece of cloth. Just as you are feeling very uncertain, you hear another voice, making sounds that are familiar to you. The stranger picks you up, and you feel very relieved. Now come back to this room, and think about your feeling as the toddler.

Conclude by asking students to complete the sentence, “Cultural sensitivity is”.

10. “Cultural Research Project”: Assign students to research their own culture or they can choose to research a culture that is different from their own.

Along with the library and the internet, encourage students to interview older members of

their own family, a friend, or neighbor representing the cultural group. Many communities have recent immigrants that could be interviewed. If there are exchange students located in your school, students could also use these people as resources. Suggestions for the information to research can be found in the handout, "Cultural Research/Interview Assignment" (SM-5). Students should prepare written reports of their findings and share verbal summaries with the class as appropriate throughout the unit. Remind students to cite their sources and use proper documentation in their papers. (*Awareness of Context*)

11. **"Socioeconomic Status":** Write the words "Socioeconomic Status" on the whiteboard or on a transparency. Have students copy down the word and write a definition. Have students share and discuss their definitions. Write the following definition on the whiteboard:

"Socioeconomic status (SES) is a person's position or standing in society because of such factors as social class, level of education, income and type of job."
(Nebraska Department of Education)

Have the students choose a partner for the next activity and have the oldest person in the pair choose a "Socioeconomic Status Scenarios" card (SM-6). Put the directions and questions below, on the whiteboard, or on a transparency (TM-1). Set a time limit for the discussion of their scenario. They may want to record their comments regarding their scenario. Return to large group discussion and have pairs share their comments.

- What stressors were felt by the parents?
- What level of SES was this family?
- According to the information given about SES levels and parenting behaviors, how might the family handle the given situation?
- Compare how your scenario family might handle the situation if they were of a different level of SES.
- What types of societal factors could influence or change the situation of the family?
- How could their parenting behaviors affect their children's future and beliefs about parenting?

Note to Teacher: To update the current wages and cost of living expenses check out the Oregon Department of Employment website.

Supporting Concept C: Influences in Society

12. **"Know, Want, Learned":** Divide students into small groups of 3 to 4 in each. Using a K-W-L format what do we know, what do we want to know, what have we learned - have each group collect information in the first 2 columns (SM-7); what do we know now about media, and how it influences children's development, and what do we want to know more about in this area?

Class Discussion: Have each group share their information, with the teacher/facilitator acknowledging what the class is most interested in learning more about in regard to this issue. Save the K-W-L papers to fill in the remaining column later. (*Awareness of Context*)

Interview: Have each student conduct an interview with a parent, or adult of their parent's age, as well as a self interview on the following questions:

- a. Describe, including the name if you can recall, a children's television program that you remember from your childhood. What appealed to you about that particular program?

- b. What is an example of a currently airing children’s television program that you would recommend for a child today?
- c. Is there any difference between what you remember watching when you were young and what is currently available? If so, what is the difference?

When students bring their responses back to class, have them analyze their findings in relation to a list of quality programming for children’s viewing. Quality children’s programs should:

- Include no gratuitous sex or violence
- Include no racial, gender, cultural, or religious bias
- Demonstrate or encourage safe behaviors: physically, cognitively, socially, and emotionally
- Empower children, rather than be condescending towards them
- Include no verbal or physical abuse or put-down behaviors

Have students discuss: Did the programming my interview was about meet the criteria above? How can television and media be used effectively in child development?
(*Consequences of Actions, Desired Results*)

13. “View Children’s Television”: Show an appropriate-length clip of a current television program aimed at children. Have students consider, when they are watching it, what conversations a parent/adult might have with a child as they watch together. Does it afford opportunities to:

- Initiate important conversations?
- Encourage educational follow-up activities?
- Allow a child to talk about his or her feelings in the context of a fictional character? (Give them something to relate to without feeling like it’s them)
- Be a good spin-off for further research? (For example, a program on spiders might encourage the child to want to learn more about them)

Discuss in small groups, with reporters coming back to the large group. (*Alternative Approaches, Consequences of Action*)

14. “Media”: Have students discuss the two editorial cartoons on television violence (TM-3 and TM-4).

- What is the message?
- Do you agree/disagree?
- Why or why not?

Using the statements on television (TM-5), ask students:

- How do these quotes make you feel?
- Should media be more responsible about the message that is sent?

Discuss the statistics related to children and television (TM-6). (*Awareness of Context*)

Ask students to brainstorm and list on white board, “What is Media?” (Television, movies, music, internet, video games, newspaper, magazines, etc.)

Brainstorm a list of media influences: Divide a sheet of paper in half lengthwise. On the left side of the folded paper write "Positive Effects". On the right side of the folded papers, write "Negative Effects."

- Pair-Think-Share "Positive and Negative Effects"
- Make a class list
- Teacher might add to list: hinders brain development, hinders language acquisition, physical inactivity, promotes aggression and violence, fear and depression, distorted self-image, isolation and loneliness.

Discuss "Media Hazards" (SM-8).

(Awareness of Context, Consequences of Action)

15. Assignment: Choose one or more of the following activities for students to complete outside of class. Identify a "due date" for the assignment that provides sufficient time to complete the activity or activities.

- "Television or Movie Analysis" (SM-9)
- "Screen Stereotypes" (SM-10)
- "Cartoons" (SM-11)
- "Rewriting Violent Scripts" (SM-12)

16. "TV Family Lifestyles": Give students the assignment "TV Family Lifestyles" (SM-13) to complete over several days. Discuss the following upon completion of the assignment:

- What family structures are most prevalently portrayed by television?
- Are they realistic situations?
- If challenges were present, did you agree with the ways they were handled?
- How might challenges have been handled differently?

(Alternative Approaches, Desired Results)

17. "Parent Interviews": Have each student interview two parents from different families, using "Parent Interview Questions" (SM-14). Students can also add questions that would be appropriate to use in their situation. The information gathered through these interviews will be shared with the class.

(Awareness of Context)

18. "Resources for Parents": How does the internet become a tool for parents who want to use media as a positive influence on their child's development? Have students work in groups to research and report on quality programming for children that could be resources for parents. Some of these would be: Children's Television Workshop, MAGIC (Media Activities and Good Ideas by, with and for Children) through UNICEF, and Babyclassroom.com.

19. "Complete Know-Want-Learned": Have students return to the K-W-L sheets that they began filling out at the beginning of this issue. In those same small groups, have students determine what they have now learned about media influences on children's development. *(Synthesis, Desired Results)*

20. Reflection/Reaction: Read expert, "Media," from *The Shelter of Each Other* (SM-15).

Select from the following:

- Complete a 1-page summary reaction
- Complete the following open-ended journal response:
I found out that.....
I was surprised.....

It was no surprise.....
I am concerned.....
I want to use this information in the following way(s).....
(*Awareness of Context, Consequences of Actions*)

21. Culminating Media Project: Choose one of the following:

A. Develop a pamphlet that could be used to educate parents and caregivers. Be sure to include:

- Hazards of excessive media
- Guidelines that can be used to protect children in a media culture.

B. Write a letter encouraging positive media programming and exposure for children. Students could write to a regulatory agency, network or television station, video game manufacturer, or major film studio. (*Alternatives, Desired Results*).

22. "Consumer Culture": Share two or more of the following quotes:

- "It's really harmful, what we are doing: we tell kids that without our product, they are nothing, worthless." (*Marketer*)
- "I think there are some (products) out there that are downright offensive and disgusting, that just offend me with what pure unadulterated, unapologetic crap they are. But we have products to sell and money to be made and there's definitely a market for these things." (*Amanda Carlson, former food marketer*)
- "There are places people go to escape their worries. Where their defenses are down. Happiness abounds. And their minds are as malleable as putty. Sounds to us like the perfect opportunity to stick your product in their faces." (*Eventive Marketing sales brochure*)
- "At the end of the day, my job is to get people to buy things....It's a horrible thing and I know it." (*New York advertising executive Mary Prescott*)
- "It's our job to make people unhappy with what they have." (*B.E. Puckett, businessman*)
- "Advertising at its best is making people feel that without their product, you're a loser. Kids are sensitive to that. If you tell them to buy something, they are resistant. But if you tell them that they'll be a dork if they don't, you've got their attention. You open up emotional vulnerabilities and it's very easy to do with kids because they're most emotionally vulnerable." (*Nancy Shalek, President Shalek Agency*)
- "It isn't enough to just advertise on television...You've got to reach kids throughout their day – in school, as they're shopping in the mall...or at the movies. You've got to become part of the fabric of their lives." (*Carol Herman, Senior Vice President, Grey Advertising*)

Have students respond in their journal to the following:

- How did the quote make you feel?
- Do you think advertisers should be more responsible?

- Why isn't there more regulation of "truth" in advertising?

(Awareness of Context)

23. "Conscious Manipulation, Unconscious Decisions": Have students read, "Conscious Manipulation, Unconscious Decisions" (SM-16). Then have the class discuss the following:

- How has knowledge of human psychology influenced marketers?
- How do ads elevate feelings over thinking and impulses over common sense?
- How does advertising teach us to live for pleasure?
- Can needs for love, security, and a sense of belonging be met with products?
- What do you think is meant by "the American Dream has been re-written in the language of advertisers?" *(Awareness of Context)*

Discuss what is meant by "materialism"?

- Belief that material possessions will assure us of who we are; increase our value in the eyes of others, and bring us the good life
- Overwhelming message is "Things make the person"; "What is important is what you own, not who you are."
- Consequences:
 - ✓ Pursuit of material objects in an attempt to find security and happiness
 - ✓ Neglect other ways to bring more concrete and lasting satisfaction and joy
- How does materialism affect parenting?
- Can parents get caught in the cycle of giving children "things" rather than spending time with them?
- Does materialism teach values like honesty, courage, self-control, respect, responsibility? Why or why not?
(Awareness of Context, Consequences of Actions)

24. "Six Basic Screen Advertising Techniques": Provide students with a handout or make a transparency of SM-17. Discuss the techniques and ask students to provide examples from their own experience and knowledge. *(Awareness of Context)*

25. Journal Assignment: "The Good Life": Imagine you, ten years from now. Write a description of your idea of the "good life."

- What would you need (materially and non-materially) to have this "good life"?
- What would your relationships with others be like as you strive to reach the "good life"?

26. Short Story Activity: "A Time in My Life": In this activity you will examine the consequences of the belief that self-identity comes from the material dimensions of life. Write a short story about a time in your life when you felt that if you owned a "particular thing" you would be happy, or that you would be surer of yourself.

Criteria for your story:

- Be a real-life situation
- Be interesting to read
- Be a clear example of the belief that a material item would make you happy.

Answer these questions at the end of your story:

- What was the main problem or concern?

- What was important to you?
- What factors contributed to your belief that this item would make you happy?
- What were the results?
- What are other ways to pursue happiness? (*Awareness of Context, Consequences of Actions, Alternative Approaches*)

27. Critical Analysis of Media and Advertising: The purpose of this assignment is to critically evaluate the media and advertising. Find 3 ads in a newspaper or magazine that you think are targeted to children or teens. Attach to a piece of paper.

Answer the following questions on the back of each mounted ad:

1. What are the advertisers trying to sell?
2. For whom is the message intended?
3. What is the message being communicated?
4. What emotional appeal does the ad use to convince you that you need what they are selling? (What non-material needs are they appealing to?)
5. Note the body language in the ad. What does the body language say to you?
6. Does the ad work? Would you buy the product?
(*Awareness of Context, Consequences*)

28. Critical Analysis of Television Commercials: Choose a television program you enjoy watching. Make two columns on a piece of paper. Label one "Product" and the other "What Happens." Respond to these questions:

1. What caught your interest in the commercials?
2. Could what happened on the commercial happen in real life? Why or why not?
3. What did you learn about the product advertised?
4. Would you need more information in order to buy the product?
5. Were the commercials louder and/or faster than the program? Why do you think they made it that way?
6. Did you have to pay a lot of attention to understand what was happening? Or was it easy to pay attention?
7. For whom is the commercial made?
8. If you were making this commercial, would you change anything about it? What? Why?
(*Awareness of context, consequences*)

Adapted from: *Screen Smarts: A Family Guide to Literacy*, Gloria DeGaetano & Kathleen Bander, Houghton Mifflin Company, New York, 1996.

29. "Audience Appeal": The purpose of this activity is to identify the methods advertisers use to appeal to the television audience. Prepare a handout for students or a transparency master of "Audience Appeals" (SM-18/TM-7) and review the types of appeals used to capture an audience.

- Watch television until you have found examples of each of the types of appeals.
- Which appeal did you think works best? Why?
- Are there any that you don't think work at all? Why not?
- Which audiences would be susceptible to the different types of appeals?
- Is manipulation fair?
- Is it necessary?
- Why does it seem to work?
- Do you think most people are aware of these specific ways they are being manipulated? Why or why not?

(Awareness of context, Consequences)

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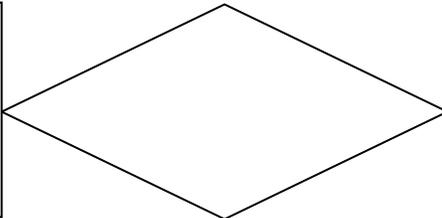
COMPARE AND CONTRAST

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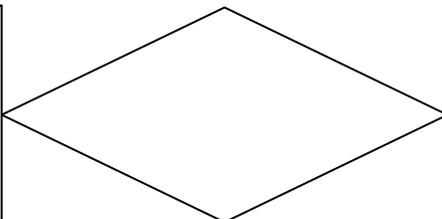
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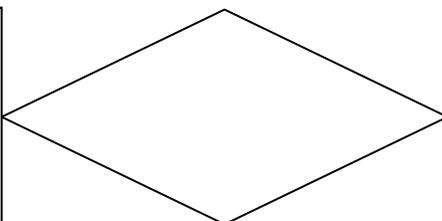
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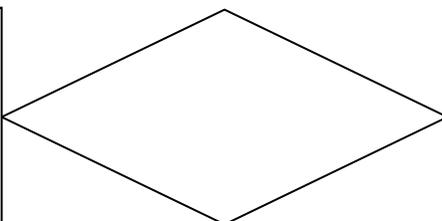
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What is Culture?

“Through culture, children gain a sense of who they are, a feeling of belonging, what is important, what is right and wrong, how to care for themselves and others, and what to celebrate, eat, and wear.”
(Infant/Toddler Caregiving: A Guide to Culturally Sensitive Care)

Culture is made up of all those factors in your environment that are accepted by the group as the norm. Culture includes attitudes, values, laws, cherished beliefs, and ways of doing things. The foundation for many cultures rests upon accepted beliefs. Culture includes ideas about:

- Ways to relate to one’s elders
- Behavior between boys and girls
- Roles of women and men
- Ownership of property
- Prohibitions of certain kinds of behavior according to people’s status
- Childrearing practices such as discipline, toilet training, feeding, and bathing
- Expectations about behavior at various ages
- Attitudes toward differences in people and toward strangers
- Rites of passage
- Marriage ceremonies
- Birth ceremonies
- The meaning of death and ways of dealing with death

Defining a Cultural Context

Reflect on the practices/attitudes of your home/household as you were growing up and comment on the topics listed below:

1. Reaction to a child's crying:
2. Expression of anger by adults:
3. Expression of anger by a child:
4. Differences in treatment between boys and girls:
5. Child's curiosity about her or his body:
6. Toilet training practices:
7. Discipline methods:
8. Who was the authority figure:
9. Importance of child's curiosity and exploration:
10. How affection was expressed:
11. Children's rights to be heard:
12. Talking openly about feelings:

13. Disagreements and confrontations:
14. Importance of food:
15. Behavior toward elders:
16. Value of education:
17. Status of teachers:
18. Use of English (if bilingual household):
19. Ownership --- borrowing, lending, sharing:
20. Importance of religion:

Things in My Culture

Think of the culture of your childhood. Describe the items listed.

Favorite family food _____

Everyday dress _____

Favorite family activity _____

Most popular holiday _____

A symbol of that holiday _____

One famous artist _____

A popular song _____

A famous landmark _____

A well-known book _____

Cultural Research Project

Directions:

Choose one of the following to research:

- a. Your culture
- b. A culture that is different from your own

As you do your interview and research project, look for the following information:

1. Is there a racial identity or religious group represented by this culture?
2. What are the expectations of behavior?
3. What are the attitudes toward differences in people and toward strangers?
4. What is this culture's attitude towards educational achievements for their children?
5. Are there distinct differences in expectations of how male and female children act?
6. Which parent plays more of a dominant role? Why?
7. What values are reflected in this group? How are these values communicated to the children?
8. Are there special events in this culture? Rites of passage? Marriage/birth rituals?
9. What are the roles of women and men in this culture?

** During your research or interview, add any other information relating to culture such as family traditions, economic influence, etc.

Search the library and/or internet, as well as interview older members of your own family, a friend, or neighbor representing the chosen culture. Many communities have recent immigrants that could be interviewed. If there are exchange students located in your school you could also use these people as resources.

Scenario #1:

Susie and Jared are a happily married couple and were both raised in medium level socioeconomic status families. They live in a two bedroom, one bath house. They have a two-year-old son Jack and their second child is due any day. Susie works at a local bank as a teller, but is on non-paid 12-week maternity leave. Susie has already used up one week of her maternity leave. She typically works 30 hours a week and brings home \$270 each week. She also just finished up her first year of community college and is taking time off from school until the baby is about 6 months old. Jared is a physical trainer for the university football team and brings home \$3,200 per month. He has full medical and dental benefits under which Susie, Jack and the new baby will be covered. Their adjusted monthly bills with Susie not working (no child care expense) is approximately \$2,800 per month. Jack is becoming autonomous and wants to do things on his own without help from his parents. Recently he has become fond of dressing himself and when Susie or Jared try to dress him he exhibits defiant behavior, especially if they are in a hurry to go somewhere. Today, as Susie was trying to get out the door to a doctor appointment Jack didn't want to put on his shoes. He screamed, "No!!!" as Susie tried to put on his shoes and then he went limp as a noodle so she couldn't pick him up.

Scenario #2:

Yesenia and Sergio are a couple in their mid-thirties. They have two young children, Andy who is five years old and Nayeli, three years old. Yesenia is a stay-at-home mom who is taking classes to keep up her nursing license (3 credits per trimester). Sergio owns his own advertising business and brings home a salary of \$8,000 per month after taxes. They own a house and two cars. Their total monthly expenses, including mortgage, savings for property taxes, car payments, utilities, phone and credit card bills is \$5,000 a month. Yesenia and Sergio both grew up in high socioeconomic status families and got assistance from their parents to start out. Andy is in kindergarten and Nayeli attends preschool and Yesenia volunteers at both schools. Nayeli's teacher has pulled Yesenia aside more than once to discuss how Nayeli has begun to hit and kick the other children when she gets angry. Yesenia has also noticed this at home when Nayeli and Andy are playing.

SM-6 (Continued)

Scenario #3:

Tanya and Jared are both 20 years old, recently married and have a three-year-old son Tommy. Tanya works full time as a receptionist for a local business. Jared also works full time learning the ropes at a local garage in the hopes of becoming a mechanic and making a better living. Tanya and Jared struggle making ends meet each month but make \$20 a month over the requirements for state and federal assistance such as Aid to Dependent Families with Children (AFDC), food stamps, housing assistance, Medicaid and subsidized childcare. Both Tanya and Jared's families also work full time, are barely scraping by and therefore cannot provide assistance financially or with childcare. Tommy spends Monday through Friday from 7:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. in an inexpensive, non-licensed, in-home childcare facility. Tommy has recently had trouble sleeping and has begun to refuse to go to childcare in the mornings, latching onto Tanya's leg and causing Tanya and Jared to miss work or be extremely late on several occasions. Both Tanya and Jared's employers have given warnings that if they miss any more work in the next month they will lose their jobs.

Scenario #4:

Nadia and Reggie are a happily married couple who tried for three years to have a child and went through genetic counseling after several miscarriages. Nadia and Reggie finally became pregnant and gave birth to a happy, healthy, baby boy Chris four years ago. Both Nadia and Reggie worked full time before Chris was born but decided that while Chris was still young Nadia would work part-time and Reggie would continue to work full time as they need the cushion of Nadia's additional income. Small as her income may be, it provides a safety net for unexpected expenses and family "fun" money. While Nadia and Reggie are at work Chris spends his time with Reggie's parents, as they are retired and live close by and love having Chris around. Twice a week, when Nadia is home, she arranges play dates for Chris with local families she met through her "Mommy Support Group" at the hospital where she gave birth. Reggie has worked it out with his employer that he can have every other Friday off in order to spend time with the family and plans father/son days to bond with his son. Tonight the family is going out to eat at Nadia's favorite restaurant. Chris is seated in a booster chair next to Reggie. The dessert display is across from the table and Chris stares at the array of treats. When the food arrives Chris looks at his green beans and says, "Yuck, I hate green beans. Nadia responds with, "Try them, you like them at home." Chris then yells at the top of his lungs, "I don't want green beans. I want that!" as he points to the dessert display and then begins to whine and scream in full volume as everyone in the restaurant turns to look at their table.

TM-2 (Scenario Questions)

Use these questions to discuss your scenario with your partner:

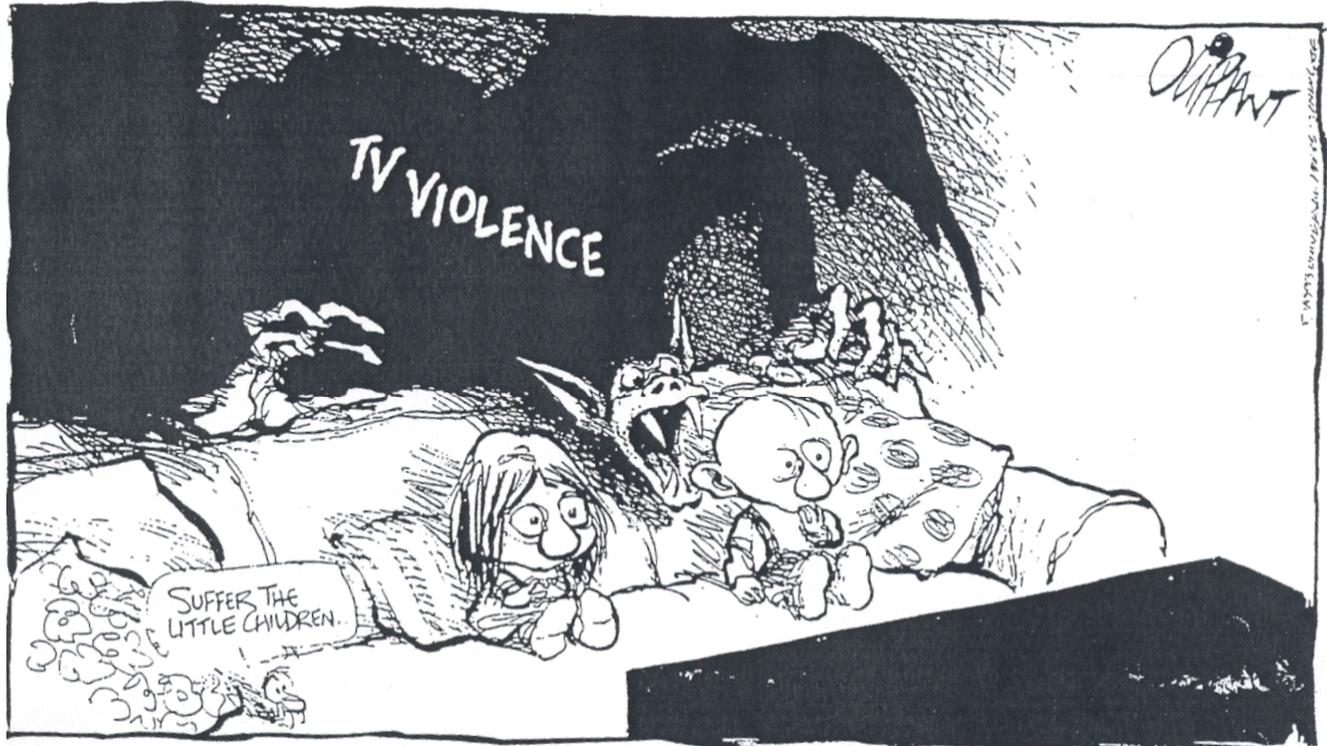
1. What stressors were felt by the parents?
2. What level of SES was this family?
3. According to the information given about SES levels and parenting behaviors, how might the family handle the given situation?
4. Compare how your scenario family might handle the situation if they were a different level of SES.
5. What types of societal factors could influence or change the situation of the family?
6. How could their parenting behaviors affect their children's future and beliefs about parenting?

Know, Want, Learned

What do we **Know** now about television/media for children?

What do we **Want** to know more about, when we think about children and the media?

At the end of the unit, what have we **Learned** about television/media and their effects on children?



ONE BY ONE THE CHILDREN DISAPPEARED, AND WITH THEM THEIR CHILDHOODS.

“Video games that children are playing are the same killing simulator tools the military uses to desensitize its soldiers.”

David Grossman, National Expert on Violence

“A 2001 *Pediatrics* study found that more than half of all concept music videos involve violence, usually against women. One-fourth of all MTV videos portray violence, and attractive role models are the aggressors in more than 80% of these videos.”

Juliet Shor, Born to Buy

Statistics – Media and Children

- **Children growing up today spend an enormous amount of time glued to the TV screen. They average 35 hours per week of screen time, either watching TV or playing video games.**
- **Children in the United States watch an average of 3 to 5 hours of television each day.**
- **Prime-time television shows depict an average of 5 to 6 violent acts per hour, and Saturday morning children’s programs show an average of 20 to 25 violent acts.**
- **Only 10% of children’s viewing time is spent watching children’s television. The other 90% is spent watching programs designed for adults.**

National Association for the Education of Young Children
Pamphlet #585, “Media Violence & Children,” 1998

Media Hazards

When children watch television, they may be physically passive, but they are absorbing information, ideas, and values. When they have toys and other products that are marketed with what they see, the messages of violence are even stronger. Because media are such powerful teachers, adults must pay attention to the lessons children learn.

Research consistently identifies six problems associated with repeated viewing of media violence:

1. Children are more likely to behave in aggressive or harmful ways toward others. They begin to see violence as a normal response to stress and an acceptable means of resolving conflict. Children who repeatedly observe aggressive problem-solving behavior tend to replay what they have seen in real-life situations. Media violence can be a “how-to-do-it” training for people inclined to imitate observed behavior or trigger repressed (hidden/ignored) violence.
2. Children may become less sensitive to the pain and suffering of others and see violent behavior as normal. Viewing violence stimulates children to view other people as “enemies” and to be unconcerned about their welfare. They show less remorse about their own aggressive behavior and less concern about the aggressive actions of other children. Violence may be accepted not only as normal, but also as glamorous.
3. Children may become more fearful of the world around them. Exposure to media violence may compound some children’s natural anxieties.
4. Violent programming presents limited models of language development. The repetitive scripts of violent programs narrow the range and originality of children’s verbal expression at a time when the development of language is critically important.
5. Viewing media violence limits children’s imaginations. Programs that regularly depict violence often promote toys that encourage children to imitate the actual behaviors seen on TV or in the movies. Young children have a natural tendency and need to explore many make-believe roles and to play imaginatively to learn about themselves and their world. Heavy screen time not only limits children’s playtime but also leads to imitation of fighting, gun play, and other stereotypical actions.
6. When children are glued to a screen, they are not interacting actively and positively with the environment or getting the foundation they need for learning in school.

Adapted from: National Association for the Education of Young Children
Pamphlet #585, “Media Violence and Children”, 1998

Television or Movie Analysis

This activity is designed to critically discern and question media messages and values. Choose a television program or movie and complete the following activities.

Part 1 – Counting Violent Acts on the Screen

Put a check mark whenever you see one of the following acts on the screen.

<u>Type of Violence</u>	<u>Frequency</u>
Hitting, punching	
Pushing, shoving	
Shooting, knifing	
Hurting an animal	
Destroying property	

Part 2 – Reflection Questions

1. Were you surprised with the number of violent acts? Why or why not?
2. Which violent actions are used the most/least?
3. What could the producer have done differently instead of using violent acts?
4. Did the violent acts come at any particular times in the show, i.e., just before commercials?
5. Who commits more violent acts? Men or women? Young or old? White or minority?
6. Who is harmed by the violent acts? Men or women? Young or old? White or minority?
7. What did you like or dislike about this program? Why?
8. Which character(s) seemed the most real to you? Why?
9. Has something you've just seen scared you? Made you feel uncomfortable with yourself? Made you want something?
10. What did you learn from this program or movie?
11. Do you think you should act the way the characters acted in the program or movie? Why or why not?

SM-9 (Continued)

12. If you were writing the script, what would you make different? Why?
13. When you talk to your friends about this program or movie, what will you say?
14. How were problems solved in the program or movie? Was this realistic? Why or why not?
15. How would you have solved the problem(s)?
16. Do you think people behave in real life the way they do on TV or in the movies? Why or why not?

Adapted from: *Screen Smarts-A Family Guide to Media Literacy*,
Gloria DeGaetano & Kathleen Bander, Houghton Mifflin Company, New York, 1996,
Pages 39 & 72

Screen Stereotypes

Not better, just different – Differences make us all unique and interesting. This activity is designed to analyze the impact of the media in promoting stereotypes. Choose from one or more of the following activities:

1. **Working people on TV.** For one week, keep a list of men’s and women’s TV occupations. When it comes to work, how are the male and female depicted – do patterns emerge? Are characters’ occupations stereotyped?
2. **Who isn’t on TV?** Make a list of non-stereotypical roles that you don’t encounter on TV, such as a Hispanic doctor or an elderly policeman.
3. **Inventory of roles.** Over the course of one week, write down the minority group characters you see on television, including occupations and a few character traits. Compare and contrast these descriptions to the Caucasian characters on the same or similar programs.
4. **Casting director.** You are going to be the casting director for two TV shows. One will be a situation comedy about a neighborhood; the other will be a police show. Write a short description of the type of person you would choose for each of the following characters, detailing what they’d look like, what their personalities would be like, and how they’d act.
 - For the situation comedy, create a postal worker, a neighborhood child, a sanitation worker, a house painter, an owner of the largest house on the block, a renter, two neighbors, the bad kid on the block, and the friendliest person on the block.
 - For the police show, create a police chief, a sergeant, a detective, a secretary, three prisoners, and a janitor.
 - Look over your list when you are finished. Do you notice any stereotypes in the way you have cast these characters?
5. **Sexism in advertising.** Make a list of products advertised by women and products advertised by men on television. What do you see? Is there stereotyping?
6. **Repetitive roles.** Discuss the setting of TV commercials. Where are the women usually seen? Men? Minorities? Older people? Children? Disabled?
7. **I know that person.** Compare a TV character to someone you know who’s about the same age in real life. How are they the same? What differences do you find? How “real” is the TV character?
8. **Debate gender stereotypes.** The topic of the debate is regarding “Gender stereotypes on TV and in the movies do (or do not) influence teen behavior in the opposite sex.” Develop at least ten pro or con arguments for this proposal. A debate can be set up in the classroom.

- 9. *Secret Wishes.*** Who is to know if you secretly want hair like Jessica Simpson or to be buff like Brad Pitt? Think of how images of the ideal may have you longing for an image rather than valuing the individualistic person you are. When you watch TV and start having a secret wish, talk about it with your parents or friends. See if they have any secret wishes too. Discuss how screen portrayals can get in the way of accepting ourselves as we truly are.

Adapted from: *Screen Smarts-A Family Guide to Media Literacy*

Gloria DeGaetano & Kathleen Bander, Houghton Mifflin Company, New York, 1996.

pages 148-149.

CARTOONS

Watch any cartoon and answer the following questions.

Part 1 -

1. Title _____

2. Station _____ 3. Time _____

4. Record and total the actual time of each commercial.

<u>Time of Commercial</u>	<u>Product or Service</u>
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5. What are the messages children are getting from these commercials in relation to each of the following:

- Food
- Toys
- Places to go
- People who have these things

6. Tell briefly (2-3 sentences) what happened in the cartoon.

7. Give an example from a scene in the cartoon for each of the following that is applicable:

- Display of anger or hostility by one or more characters
- Display of love or affection by one or more characters
- Death or injury of one of the characters

8. Was the action centered on home or family life? If yes, describe; If no, describe what was the center of the action.

SM-11 (Cartoons continued)

9. What is the message in the cartoon – the moral of the story?

10. Would you recommend this program to parents or let your children watch it?
Why or why not?

Part 2 –Respond to one or both of the following:

1. Write a half page reaction to the following statement: **“By high school graduation the average child will have spent 11,000 hours in school and 20,000 hours watching TV.”**

2. Write a half-page reaction addressing the following question: **“Do you think TV encourages antisocial behavior** (behavior that violates the accepted norms, such as drug abuse)?”

Rewriting Violent Scripts

Introduction:

Too often the media send the message that violence is the best way to solve human problems. This activity is designed to identify better ways to address problems.

Instructions:

As you watch a television program, movie, cartoons, or play a video game, write down the basic problems characters encounter and then write down the ways that the characters solved each problem.

After this, brainstorm ways in which people can address difficult situations without using violence.

Pretend you are the screenwriter or computer game program designer. Use your own ideas to rewrite the plot. The goal is to eliminate the violence and come up with alternative solutions to the problems. Your writing could be in the form of an outline. Be sure to pay special attention to those elements that must be changed in order to eliminate the violence: Is it the people, the places, the time, the situation?

Gloria York, DeGaetano & Kathleen Bander, *Screen Smarts-A Family Guide to Media*

TV FAMILY LIFESTYLES

Television offers different versions of the American Family. Choose one program about a family to watch and answer the following questions:

1. Describe the family in the program you watched.
2. Summarize the program.
3. How were decisions made? Who made them?
4. What challenges/conflicts arose during the program? How were they handled?
5. Was the dramatization of the family and their problems presented realistically? Explain why or why not.

PARENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The following questions are suggested to help students as they interview a variety of parents. Students should be encouraged to design other questions as appropriate.

Name: _____

Number and ages
of children: _____

Employment status of
parent(s): _____

1. What is the best part of being a parent?
2. What is the most challenging part of being a parent?
3. How do you manage household chores and child care?
4. Have you experienced financial difficulties as a parent?
5. Whom do you call on or ask for help when an emergency arises?
6. What were the most difficult adjustments in becoming a parent?
7. Did your decision to become a parent alter any future plans?
8. Do you feel you were ready to be a parent? Why or why not?
9. What did you do to prepare for parenthood?
10. What advice would you give to someone considering parenthood?

Media

The media forms our new community. The electronic village is our hometown. The old community of particular people in particular places and times who knew each other in a variety of ways over decades has been replaced by what Greg Brown calls “one big town.” Parents and children are more likely to recognize Bill Cosby or Jerry Seinfeld than they are their next-door neighbors. All of us know O.J. Michael, Newt and Madonna. The gossip is about celebrities – Did Liz spend time at a diet camp? Why did Lyle Lovett and Julia Roberts get a divorce?

Relationships with celebrities feel personal. We are sad when our favorites-Jackie, John Lennon, Roy Orbison or Jessica Tandy – die. We’re happy when Christie Brinkely marries on a mountaintop or when Oprah loses weight. We follow the news of the stars’ addictions, health problems, business deals and relationships. We know their dogs’ and children’s names. These relationships feel personal. But they aren’t.

We “know” celebrities but they don’t know us. The new community is not a reciprocal neighborhood like earlier ones. David Letterman won’t be helping out if our car battery dies on a winter morning. Donald Trump won’t bring groceries over if Dad loses his job. Jane Fonda won’t baby-sit in a pinch. Dan Rather won’t coach a local basketball team. Tom Hanks won’t scoop the snow off your driveway when you have the flu.

These vicarious relationships create a new kind of loneliness – the loneliness of people whose relationships are with personae instead of persons. Years ago a sociologist postulated that there were a critical number of social contacts that a person needed every week to stay sane. He speculated that unless seven familiar people “interacted” with the person, he or she would be at risk for mental illness. I think about that study as I write this and wonder how many people have fallen below that critical number.

The electronic community is less diverse than real life. The problems it deals with are not the problems that real people must face. Certain situations, such as young starlets being threatened or handsome men fighting crime, are over-explored. Other stories, much more common, such as school board meetings, poetry writing, trips to museums, piano practice or the delivery of Meals on Wheels, are virtually ignored. People, who are not visually interesting, which is most of us, are underrepresented. The stories that are selected are those that make money. A richness and complexity of real life disappear.

We are just beginning to grasp the implications for families of our electronic village. Parents have no real community to back up the values that they try to teach their children. Family members may be in the same house, but they are no longer truly interacting. They may be in the same room, but instead of making their own story, they are watching another family’s story unfold. Or even more likely, family members are separated, having private experiences with different electronic equipment.

SM-15 (*Media Continued*)

As Bill Moyers put it, “Our children are being raised by appliances.” There are televisions in birthing rooms so that literally, from birth on, children are exposed to media. Children see and hear information that is not appropriate to their developmental needs. Before they learn to ride tricycles, they are exposed to sexual and violent materials. Two-year-olds are not ready for sexual scenes or news of the murder of children. Five-year-olds are not equipped to think through the messages of Snoop Doggy Dog.

We flood children with sexual stimulation. In magazine ads, seminude teens lock in embrace to sell underpants or jeans. On a talk show, a man describes his sexual interest in fee. Video games often feature scantily clad sexualized women. Home computers connect pedophiles with children learning to type. Children have scant protection from sexual messages that twenty years ago would have been taboo for grown-ups.

We must remember that all television is educational. It teaches values and behavior. Children are manipulated from the time they can sit in front of a television. The average child is exposed to four hundred ads a day, which will add to more than a million ads in a lifetime. Children are taught how to be consumers and sold products – junk foods, over-priced clothes and useless toys. Two-year-olds beg parents for products they’ve seen advertised on TV. One mother told me that her son’s first words were “I want.” Another mother brought in her four-year-olds drawings of beer signs.

Children learn these things from ads: that they are the most important person in the universe, that impulses should not be denied, that pain should not be tolerated and that the cure for any kind of pain is a product. They learn a weird mix of dissatisfaction and entitlement. With the messages of ads, we are socializing children to be self-centered, impulsive and addicted. The television, which Leonard Cohen called “that hopeless little screen,” teaches values as clearly as any church.

We may try to protect our own children from such nonsense, but they live in a world with children who have been socialized into this value system. Indeed there is corporate colonialism. Children everywhere may be teased if they don’t have designer jeans and Barney toys or if they don’t know how to power-kick. Their peers will teach them to be consumers even if they do not learn from primary sources. Recently I was on the west coast of Scotland in a town overlooking the Inner Hebrides, a town of less than a hundred people that was known for its silver sands and steam train. As I hiked beside a loch, I met a girl picking wild blackberries with her mother and grandmother. She wore pink plastic Barbie doll boots.

Mary Pipher, *The Shelter of Each Other – Rebuilding Our Families*, Ballantine Books, New York, 1996, pp. 13-15

Conscious Manipulation, Unconscious Decisions

“Much of advertising’s power lies in its ability to persuade on subliminal levels. Motivational research in the fifties found that most people were motivated from two basic needs – sex and security. So ads were designed to link products with the fulfillment of those needs. Insights from psychiatry and the social sciences were used to determine how best to attract a viewing audience. In 1969, the adman Herbert Krugman hooked his secretary up to a monitor only to discover that, while watching TV, the brain’s cerebral cortex uses a different type of brain wave. Instead of being in the alert thinking state known as beta brain wave, the brain slips to the less active alpha state, in which it doesn’t actively process information from the outside world.

It wouldn’t be an overstatement to say that for the past twenty-five years the advertising industry has known more about the workings of the brain than does the average American. The fast-paced, colorful images of commercials keep active thinking to a minimum. They hook the viewer by arousing strong emotions or fears. Commercials create quick impressions and influence us to link a product with a particular feeling or a particular perception about ourselves or our world. Children are particularly vulnerable to this conditioning.

Gloria DeGaetano & Kathleen Bander,
Screen Smarts: A Family Guide to Media Literacy,
Houghton Mifflin Company, New York, 1996. p.78

Six Basic Screen Advertising Techniques

1. Fast-paced Activity

- Scenes change every 2 to 3 seconds
- Hinders ability to reason
- Keeps people watching
- Can seem more interesting

2. Selling the Image, Not the Product

- Promise beauty, popularity, sex appeal, love, eternal youth, superstar status, total fulfillment
- A form of institutionalized lying

3. Catchy Jingles Keep the Message Alive

- Rhyme, rhythm and music help us remember things more easily
- Sets a mood for manipulation

4. Popular People make the Product Popular

- Increases status appeal

5. Camera Tricks Create Hype

- Determines what emotions and impressions are communicated
- Convey important messages
- Jolts – technical events to keep attention

6. Special Props Make the Ideal Look Even Better

- Tricks used to make things look better
- Glue on cereal because milk looks too blue under lights
- Steam hot cocoa with detergent bubbles to make it look more steamy

Audience Appeals

- ❖ **Factual Appearance** – A businesslike appeal; numbers are questionable
- ❖ **Comparison** – The product is best compared to others
- ❖ **Testimonial** – Trustworthy people swear by the product
- ❖ **Clever Productions** – Dazzles the audience with fanfare, dramatics, or exaggerations
- ❖ **Bargains** – Who can turn down a bargain?
- ❖ **Integrity** – Links honesty and strength of character with the product
- ❖ **Soft Sell** – Charms the viewers or persuades through understatement
- ❖ **Popularity** – Appeals to our desire to belong to a group
- ❖ **Bandwagon** – Everybody is using it
- ❖ **Glittery Generalities** – Talks a lot without saying anything
- ❖ **Transfer** – X buys it, and I'll be more like X if I buy it
- ❖ **Putdown** – Denigrates another product, usually unnamed