THE PERCEIVED REALITY OF TELEVISION AND AGGRESSIVE PREDISPOSITIONS AMONG CHILDREN IN MEXICO

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ABSTRACT. The perceived reality of television among Mexican children is examined, with 300 children in Mexico City schools as respondents. The prediction of perceived reality from real life experiences, exposure to and functions and gratifications of television, demographics, and interpersonal contact is attempted, and the relationship between perceived reality and the child's aggressive predispositions is explored. Similarities and dissimilarities are outlined between the findings with the Mexican sample and the findings of an earlier, similar study of American children. In both cultures, the influence of significant others and the use of TV for companionship significantly predict perceived reality. Various differences between the two cultures (e.g., the importance of the level of abstraction for the referent in the American sample and not in the Mexican study) are discussed.

The issue of how children perceive the content of television has received much attention from communication scholars. The perception of television content as realistic (perceived reality of TV, or PRTV) has been shown in a number of U.S. studies to mediate how young people are affected by TV viewing (Feshbach, 1972; Thomas and Tell, 1974; Wood, 1974).

Reeves (1974) addressed the question of the determinants of the perception of TV content as real in U.S. children and he found some evidence for the explanation of the phenomenon: 1) As questions with respect to PRTV moved from abstract to more specific, the child tended to report a perception of greater reality; 2) the influence of significant others of a child was found to be positively related to PRTV; 3) as age decreased, PRTV increased; 4) as exposure to TV increased, PRTV increased; and 5) as the use of TV for relaxation, learning, and

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companionship increased, PRTV increased. He failed to confirm hypothe-
ses with respect to the relationship of PRTV with real life experiences, 
socioeconomic status, intelligence, and sex.

As past PRTV studies have generally examined the U.S. situation, 
studies in alternate cultural settings are in order. The present study was 
conducted in Mexico City, and attempts to: (1) replicate certain relation-
ships for which Reeves found support, (2) present a new text, explana-
tions, and modifications for the relationships for which Reeves did not 
find support, and (3) introduce aggressive predispositions as a criterion 
variable possibly affected by the PRTV of violent TV content.

While there is no empirically-based direct support for the idea that U.S. 
and Mexican children may differ in their PRTV, more general cultural 
comparisons indicate that Mexicans may be more fatalistic or accepting of 
external "reality" (Condon, 1980). Díaz-Guerrero (1975) summarized:

Americans tend to view external reality as something to be subjected to their will, and the success of American technology is evidence of this orientation. Latin Americans, however, take a more fatalistic attitude toward nature and feel subjugated by it. Traditionally, Mexicans have done little to put external reality [the reality created by the interactions among people in a social or communicative relationship] under their control. However, Mexicans tend surprisingly to assume that interpersonal reality can be modified at will (p. 18).

Condon (1980) has likewise noted that for the Mexican, multiple kinds of truth exist, depending on the needs of the situation. This would indicate differential effects of PRTV in the two cultures, with Mexicans experiencing perhaps lesser effects of content perceived as real, due to the external nature of TV "reality" and fatalism concerning the existence of such content.

Given Reeves' findings and the exploratory nature of attempting replication in a different culture, the following hypotheses are forwarded:

H1: Children will perceive specific television characters or events to be more real than content areas of television programming and the content areas to be more real than television in general.

H2: As the use of TV for relaxation, learning, and companionship increases, PRTV will increase.

H3: As exposure to TV increases, PRTV will increase.

H4: The information a child receives from significant others about the reality of television programming, as perceived by the child, will be positively related to the child's perceived reality of that programming.

Reeves did not find support for his additional hypothesis that as real life experiences increased, PRTV of comparable TV content would
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decrease. However, it could be argued that in fact real life experiences may counteract the stereotyping effect of the media up to a certain point, but when real life experiences are very large and varied in number, TV representations may then fit at least some of what is known in real life. This leads to tentatively state that as real life experiences increase, PRTV will follow a curvilinear pattern as follows:

H5: As real life experiences increase to a midrange point, PRTV will decrease, and as real life experiences increase further, PRTV will also increase.

The present study also attempts to clarify the character of the relationship between PRTV violence and aggressive behavioral predispositions. Atkin (1971) found partial support for the relationship of violence viewing to aggressive predispositions when mediated by the perception of the violent content as real. Feshbach (1972), Thomas and Tell (1974), Wood (1974), and Greenberg (1974b) also found support for an association between PRTV of violence and hypothetical aggression.

To the extent that the media is considered to be a school for real life, one may expect in the Mexican sample that:

H6: As the perception of TV violence as real increases, aggressive predispositions toward problem or conflict resolution will increase.

It is possible that a sex difference for such a relationship may exist, in light of Díaz-Guerrero's (1975) contention that greater tolerance for certain aggressive acts is given to males in Mexican society.

METHODOLOGY

The data for this study were collected during the winter of 1975 from 300 children in two elementary schools in Mexico City. In order to maximize the differences among respondents, half the respondents were from very low socioeconomic backgrounds, and the other half from high socioeconomic status families. Half of them were third graders, and the other half were sixth graders. There were roughly equal numbers of boys and girls in each subdivision. Ages ranged from 7 to 16 years. The questionnaires were administered to entire classrooms during regular class periods. (All scales were pretested for adaptability to the Mexican children.) The shortest time of administration was 25 minutes for the 6th graders, high SES, and the longest was one hour and 20 minutes for 3rd graders, low SES.

Variables

There were two dependent variables studied in this project: a) the
perception of reality of TV by the child at three levels of abstraction, and b) aggressive predispositions toward problem resolution.

The independent variables considered here were: 1) real life experiences with television content; 2) functions and gratifications from TV; 3) exposure to television; 4) the influence of significant others; and 5) demographic variables (SES, grade in school, age, sex, and GPA). (While not specifically hypothesized, relationships between demographics and PRTV were assessed and will be reported for clarity and possible comparison with the Reeves study.)

**Dependent Measures**

**Perception of Reality of Television.** PRTV was measured at three levels of abstraction: television in general, content areas on television, and specific television characters or behaviors. Since the questionnaire was administered in Spanish, the questions and scales used will be translated back to English for this presentation. *PRTV in general* was measured with the following items:

1. "People on TV shows are like people you know in real life."
2. "The same things that happen to people on TV shows can happen to people you know in real life."
3. "The places you see on TV shows are like the places in know in real life."

The three items intercorrelated significantly and they were summed to form an abstract PRTV index which ranged in value from three to nine.

For the second level of abstraction, questions were generated for three content areas of television programming. (The content areas used by Reeves were black people, policemen, and families.) The *content PRTV* items were:

1. "Families on TV shows are like families you know in real life."
2. "The Americans that appear on TV shows are like Americans you know in real life."
3. "Fights on TV shows are like the fights you have been involved in or you have seen in real life."

Since not all three items intercorrelated significantly, it was decided to study each content category separately. The response categories accompanying both sets of questions were: "That's true," "I don't know," and "That's not true."

At the third level of abstraction *specific PRTV* was measured for six characters or behaviors on TV. Two of these characters or behaviors were included for each of the three content areas specified above.

The questions for specific *families* were:
Perceived Reality of TV

1. "Do you think that the family in 'Hogar Dulce Hogar' is like the families you know in real life?"
2. "Do you think that the Partridge family is like the families you know in real life?"

The questions for specific Americans were:

1. "Do you think that Tony Blake 'The Magician' is like the Americans you know in real life?"
2. "Do you think that the children in 'Family Affair' are like American children in real life?"

And the questions for the specific fights were:

1. "Do you think that the fights on 'Mission Impossible' are like the fights you have been in or you have seen in real life?"
2. "Do you think that the fights on 'Hawaii Five-O' are like the fights you have been in or you have seen in real life?"

The possible responses to the six questions were "yes," "I don't know," and "no." The shows were selected according to an exploratory questionnaire using as criteria exposure and suitability to the content areas. The average number of children who watched each of the nine shows was 209, or 77% of the total number of respondents. (This figure is identical to that obtained by Reeves.)

Aggressive Predispositions Toward Problem Resolution. This was the second dependent variable in this study. It was operationalized in two ways, the first being a measure of predispositions towards problem resolution, and the second a measure of self-report of involvement in fights.

The first operationalization was borrowed from Leifer and Roberts (1971), and adapted to the Mexican children after pretest. The items consisted of situations in which the child may find himself in his everyday life, and several possible modes of conflict resolution are given to him to choose from. The situations that remained in the final set were as follows:

1. "You are walking down the street. A child is mad at you. He comes and hits you. What do you do?"
2. "You see that somebody is stealing your sandwich. You catch him. What do you do?"
3. "You are waiting in line to drink water. Somebody comes and pushes you. What do you do?"
4. "Somebody is telling stories about you behind your back. You notice it. You see him after school. What do you do?"
5. "When you are leaving school you see two children hitting your best friend. What do you do?"
The responses the children could indicate fell into either physical aggression, withdrawal, or denounce categories. The items were taken into consideration only when the physical aggression response was used.

Since all the items correlated significantly with each other, an index of physical aggressive predispositions was formed by adding the responses to all five items, and it ranged from 0 to 5. The second operationalization of aggressive predispositions was “How often do you get into fights?” and the response categories were “many times,” “sometimes,” “almost never,” and “never.” The correlation between the two measures was \( r = .24 \ (p < .05) \).

**Independent Measures**

**Real Life Experiences with TV Content.** Two questions were generated for each of the three content areas. The questions with respect to real life experiences with families and Americans were:

1. “How often do you play with your friends in their homes?”
2. “How often do you talk to the families of your friends in their homes?”
3. “How often do you see Americans in real life?” (not on TV)
4. “How often do you talk to Americans?”

For real life experiences with fights the following questions were used:

5. “How often do you see people fighting in real life?” (not on TV)
6. “How often do you get into fights?”

In response, the children were to indicate: “many times,” “sometimes,” “almost never,” and “never.” Each pair of items for each area of experience correlated significantly and an index of experience was formed for each pair of items by summing them. It should be noted that item 6 is the same one utilized for the self-report of engagement in fights, and it was not correlated or otherwise analyzed, with itself or with an index containing it.

**Functions and Gratifications From TV.** Three items were used for measuring each of these uses or functions of television: Relaxation, learning and companionship. For relaxation, the items used were:

1. “How often do you watch TV in order to relax?”
2. “How often do you watch TV in order to calm down when you are in a temper?”
3. “How often do you watch TV because it’s a nice way to rest?”

The items used for learning were:
4. "How often do you watch TV for finding out about the things that happen in the world?"
5. "How often do you watch TV in order to learn how to behave?"
6. "How often do you watch TV in order to learn things about yourself?"

For companionship the following are the items that were used:

7. "How often do you watch TV because it's like a real friend for you?"
8. "How often do you watch TV in order not to be alone?"
9. "How often do you watch TV when there is nobody to talk to or to play with?"

These items are adapted variations of the items used by Reeves and by Greenberg (1974). The possible responses were: "always," "many times," "sometimes," and "never." The three items for each of the functions intercorrelated significantly and an index was formed for each which could range from 3 to 12.

**Exposure to TV.** Exposure to TV was measured in two different ways. First, the children were asked to put a check next to the names of the shows they watched "every week or almost every week" on a list of 22 programs, which excluded the shows referred to in the reality measures. The mean number of shows checked was 14 with a standard deviation of 4.7.

The second measure of exposure was the shows in the content areas. The children were asked to indicate whether they watched each of the six shows almost every week, sometimes, or never. An index of specific exposure was formed to fit the abstract PRTV index by adding up the scores, and the resulting range was from 0 to 12. For comparability with each of the content areas three subindexes were created: One for families, one for Americans, and one for exposure to fights. The exposure items were also used individually for comparability with the PRTV of each of the shows.

**The Influence of Significant Others.** The composite influence of interpersonal sources on the perception of reality of the child was assessed with two measures: An approximation of the amount of interaction with others about specific TV characters, and a report of whether the interaction content affirmed or rejected the reality of the TV characters. For the former, a child could mention interactions with all, some, or none of the following: Friends, mother or father, and/or brothers or sisters. If the child reported interactions with at least one source he/she was asked to report his/her perception as to whether he/she thought the source(s) believe that the character (or behavior) is like its real-life counterpart. The bias question could be answered with a "yes," "I don't know," or "no." The number of sources was multiplied by the bias to render an index of the influence of significant others that ranged from −3 to +3. Positive scores attest that the information the child receives is in favor of the reality of what she/he watches. Indexes were created to match the PRTV measures.
Demographics. The high SES children were characterized by the fact that their parents paid approximately $60 a month for tuition. The low SES children went to a public school where no tuition was paid. About 10% of these children did not wear shoes, and the school was located in an industrial area of the city. The GPA of the children was their average grade for the school year 1974-1975, as reported by the teacher in charge of each group of children. The school tests, on which the GPA is based, is uniform for all schools in the country. The children were also requested to report their age and sex. Their grade in school was recorded.

RESULTS

The results of this study will be presented in the order of the hypotheses proposed. This will be followed by the presentation of the results of a multivariate analysis of the data.

1. The Level of Abstraction for the Referent on TV

Children were asked to report their perceptions of reality at three levels of abstraction: a content-free or abstract level, content areas, and specific characters or behaviors. The abstract PRTV index rendered a mean of 2.28, the average of the means for the content PRTV items was 2.29, and the average for the specific items was 1.96. The trend of higher perceived reality for more abstract concepts is opposite to that found by Reeves with his American sample, and contrary to the hypothesis of this study. An analysis of variance repeated measures was conducted for a-posteriori comparisons. The specific measures were found to be in the average significantly lower than the average of the content measures and the abstract PRTV index, there being no difference between these latter two. For comparison purposes, the means of similar measures of PRTV used by Reeves and in this study are presented in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mexican Children (Korzenny/Neuendorf)</th>
<th>American Children (Reeves)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract PRTV Index</td>
<td>6.76*</td>
<td>5.80</td>
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<tr>
<td>Content PRTV Index</td>
<td>6.87*</td>
<td>6.71</td>
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<tr>
<td>Specific PRTV Index</td>
<td>5.88*</td>
<td>7.17</td>
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<tr>
<td>Content PRTV Families</td>
<td>2.13</td>
<td>1.98</td>
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<td>PRTV of Families in the</td>
<td>2.31</td>
<td>2.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partridge Family</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Multiplied by three for comparability.
### TABLE 2

**t** tests and Pearson Correlation Coefficients for PRTV Measures by Demographics, Functions and Gratifications, Exposure, and the Influence of Significant Others

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRTV MEASURES</th>
<th>DEMOGRAPHICS</th>
<th>FUNCTIONS</th>
<th>EXPOSURE</th>
<th>Influence of Significant Others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grade in School</td>
<td>SEX</td>
<td>GPA</td>
<td>Relaxation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract PRTV index</td>
<td>2.80*</td>
<td>-2.49</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>-1.36</td>
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<tr>
<td>Content PRTV families</td>
<td>-4.00</td>
<td>2.27*</td>
<td>-.15*</td>
<td>-1.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content PRTV Americans</td>
<td>-2.04</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content PRTV fights</td>
<td>3.80*</td>
<td>3.04*</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>.11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Specific PRTV families in:
- Hogar Dulce Hogar: 3.15* | 4.64* | -.14* | 1.03 | -.29* | .00 | .16* | .09 | .24* | .05 | .36* |
- The Partridge Family: -1.93 | 3.52* | -.24* | -.99 | -.01 | .19* | .24* | .31* | .05 | .12* | .39* |

Specific PRTV Americans in:
- The Magician: -2.37 | 2.47* | -.17* | .61 | -.02 | .05 | -.02 | .06 | .03 | .08 | .44* |
- Family Affair: 5.91* | .49 | -.17* | -1.09 | .21 | .01 | -.09 | .11 | .05 | .13* | .34* |

Specific PRTV fights in:
- Mission Impossible: 1.56* | 3.85* | -.20* | 1.02 | -.15* | 14* | 12* | 10 | 13* | -.06 | .34* |
- Hawaii Five-O: 1.03* | 3.33* | -.12* | -1.40 | -.19* | .11 | 13* | 14* | .15* | .02 | .43* |

*P ≤ .05, in the hypothesized direction.
2. Functions and Gratifications from Television

The Pearson product moment correlations that test the hypothesis with respect to the functions that TV serves are found in Table 2. Positive coefficients confirm the hypothesis proposed.

The Use of TV for Relaxation. Only three out of the ten correlations obtained are significant. In general, this hypothesis is rejected, and it can be said that as the use of TV for relaxation increased, PRTV did not in general change. These results are not very different from Reeves'; the Mexican and American children were not very different in their appreciation of TV reality with respect to their use of the set for relaxation.

The Use of TV for Learning. Seven positive significant correlations confirm this hypothesis in general for every measure of PRTV except those items related to the reality of Americans on TV. The more the child watches TV for learning, the more likely he is to perceive TV in general, families and fights, both in content areas and with respect to specific characters or behaviors, as realistic. Similar support was found by Reeves with his U.S. sample.

The Use of TV for Companionship. Five out of the ten coefficients are significant and two more are very close to being statistically significant. The hypothesis is considered to be at least partially confirmed. Notably, as in the case of learning, content PRTV of Americans and the PRTV of Americans in two shows, exhibit little or no relationship with using TV for companionship.

The use of TV for companionship was positively related to the perception of TV in general as real, with the PRTV of families and fights in content areas, and the PRTV of families and fights in The Partridge Family and in Hawaii Five-O, respectively. These results are also consistent across the American and Mexican studies.

3. Exposure

There were two measures of exposure used in this study—one general consisting of exposure to 22 shows, and the other specific consisting of exposure to shows in the content areas. For the general measure of exposure, five out of the ten correlations were found to be statistically significant. In the case of the measures of exposure to specific shows in the content areas, out of the ten correlations three were found to be significant: the PRTV of families in the content area, the PRTV of families in The Partridge Family, and the PRTV of Americans in Family Affair.
Across the two measures of exposure, only the relationship with the PRTV of families in the content area seems to hold. In all other cases the general index of exposure to 22 shows and the measures of specific exposure do not agree in their association with PRTV.

The hypothesis that the more the child watches TV the more he perceives it to be real is partially supported in the case of the general exposure index, and rejected in the case of the specific measures of exposure to the six shows in the content areas. The results with respect to the general exposure index are congruent with Reeves'.

4. The Influence of Significant Others (ISO)

Table 2 contains zero-order correlations that test the prediction that as the amount of influence by significant others with respect to the reality of TV increases, the PRTV of the child will increase.

Seven of the ten correlations are significant and generally quite high in the predicted direction. These results are remarkably similar to those found with the American sample. At the specific level, the relationships were the highest found in the study, while at the content and abstract levels the results were unimpressive. The congruency of the studies is highly suggestive, but one must bear in mind that in neither study any attempt was made to check the children's perceptions of the influence received against the report of their sources on interpersonal influence. The hypothesis is considered to be supported.

5. Real Life Experiences with TV Content

This hypothesis predicts a curvilinear relationship between PRTV and real life experiences with TV content. In order to test this hypothesis Eta correlation coefficients were computed and F tests for deviation from linearity obtained (for computing formulas, see Blalock, Jr., 1972, p. 412).

Like Reeves, we found no consistent relationship between reality perceptions of TV and exposure to their counterpart in real life.

6. The Effect of Perceiving Television Violence as Real on Aggressive Behavioral Predispositions

In order to test this hypothesis the following independent variables were considered: Content PRTV fights, and PRTV fights in two specific shows, namely, Mission Impossible and Hawaii Five-O. The dependent variables were the index of physical aggressive predispositions toward problem resolution, and the self-report of the frequency of the child's engagement in physical fights.

To test this hypothesis, zero-order correlations were computed between
the independent and the dependent variables. The associations found ranged from \(-.16\) to \(.11\). The only significant correlation was between the index of physical aggressive predispositions and the PRTV of Hawaii Five-O \((r = -.16, p = .05)\), but it was in the opposite direction to that anticipated. When the demographic variables were statistically controlled, the correlation dropped from \(-.16\) to \(-.09\) and became non-significant. When the same control was carried out for the rest of the relationships, they remained low and non-significant.

When considering PRTV as an intervening variable between exposure to violence on TV and aggressive predispositions, conditional zero-order correlations were computed. All possible combinations between the measures of exposure with those of aggressive predispositions by PRTV of fight were tried, and no consistent pattern emerged. An equal number of significant correlations was found between exposure and aggressive predispositions at all three levels of the measures of PRTV: not true, don't know, and true. Eight correlation coefficients were obtained at each level of PRTV, and three coefficients were significant at each level. The hypothesis that as PRTV of violence increases, aggressive predispositions will increase is rejected in this non-replicative part of the study.

**Demographics.** Table 2 also includes unhypothesized findings with regard to demographics. It is evident from examination of the table that high SES children were significantly less likely to perceive abstract PRTV and PRTV of fights. Reeves found no support of this type for his American sample. Sixth graders were found to be significantly less likely to report PRTV for most measures, with an unexpected reversal for the abstract PRTV index. Age was also negatively related to most of the PRTV measures; similar findings were obtained by Reeves.

Also similar to Reeves' results was the finding of no sex differences for PRTV. The pattern of findings for GPA indicates that the better the children do in school the less they perceive TV in general, content TV fights, and specific fights as well as the family in the show Hogar Dulce Hogar to be real. These findings are compatible with those of Reeves.

**Multivariate Analysis.** Multiple regression analysis was used in order to identify key predictors of the different PRTV measures, including demographics as possible predictors. The findings are summarized in Table 3.

For the abstract and content PRTV measures, the multiple correlations accounted for an average of about 10% of the variance. This is almost the same average found with the American sample. The amount of variance accounted for in the specific PRTV measures for individual shows was of about one fourth. This result is also similar to Reeves', although his specific measures were slightly better accounted for (about one third of the total variance).
TABLE 3
Multiple Regression Analysis of PRTV

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Multiple Correlations</th>
<th>Significant Betas**</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All Variables in the Equation</td>
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<td>Abstract PRTV index</td>
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<td>.34</td>
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<td>Specific PRTV families in: Hogar Dulce Hogar</td>
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<td>.49</td>
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<td>The Partridge Family</td>
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<td>.48</td>
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<td>Specific PRTV Americans in: The Magician</td>
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<td>Family Affair</td>
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<td>Specific PRTV fights in: Mission Impossible</td>
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<td>.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawaii Five-O</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>.49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Until the last significant contributor was added.
**Standardized partial regression coefficients.
***Influence of significant others.

The predictor variables that account for most of the variance in the different PRTV measures in a persistent fashion are: 1) the influence of significant others, 2) grade in school and age, and to a lesser extent the 3) GPA of the children, and 4) the use of TV for companionship.

Reeves, with his U.S. sample, found that the significant contributors that accounted for most of the variance were: interpersonal influence, age, general exposure to TV, and companionship.
Across the Mexican and American studies, the influence of significant others, grade in school, and the use of TV for companionship are persistent in enabling the prediction of PRTV to some extent, with a reduced number of variables.

**DISCUSSION**

The data in this study have contributed to the replicative validation of the determinants of the perception of reality of television (PRTV) in a different cultural setting. It is of definite interest to observe the similarities and differences between a U.S. sample of children and a Mexican one, since they may throw some light on the relationships between culture and information processing of children. The innovative part of this study, which attempted to encounter a relationship between the perception of reality of television violence by children and aggressive behavioral predispositions, remained inconclusive.

The similarities and dissimilarities for PRTV between the Mexican and U.S. studies deserve scrutiny. Two variables consistently showed no association with PRTV, namely real life experience with TV content, and sex. The most plausible explanation for the lack of a consistent relationship between real life experiences with TV content and PRTV may be the one offered by Reeves and by Greenberg and Reeves (1974, p. 22), that "the standard of judgment used may well be the fictional presentation, against which the true-to-life one is being weighed." Consequently, the type of information that the child uses as a standard for comparison, whether symbolic or "real" experiences, should be determined before making specific predictions with regard to the expected behavior of the relationship between real life experiences and TV representations.

Marked differences were observed between the two studies for the relationship of PRTV with the level of abstraction for the referent of television, SES, intelligence, the use of television for relaxation, and specific exposure.

Reeves found that as the referent for television went from the abstract to the more concrete, PRTV increased. In this study a reversal of this was observed. The more concrete the referent the less PRTV, with the two highest levels of abstraction showing no difference. This difference of findings may well be a function of the shows inquired about and the referents of concern (families, Americans, and fights), the preferred levels of abstraction for the two groups, the cultural backgrounds of the respondents, or a combination of these factors. One possible explanation rests on Diaz-Guerrero's (1975) argument that Mexicans view external (noninterpersonal) reality as existing independently of their lives and unchangeable by them. Thus, if specific TV content is seen as external to the Mexican child's life, it may be deemed as less realistic than general TV
content in that the latter may apply or generalize more readily to the child's interpersonal reality.

Perhaps very concrete referents, having no place in the Mexican child's interpersonal experience due to their adult orientation (e.g., police shows) and/or their American flavor, are therefore seen in some sense as "unreal." We observe that the specific shows inquired about in the Mexican study were indeed, with one exception, of foreign origin. Thus, the children may have had something quite different, and perhaps more "Mexican," in mind when responding to the abstract items. Cultural imperialism in television programming may thus prove problematic in assessing PRTV in divergent cultures, due to varying bases upon which comparisons of "reality" are made. An alternative view, however, expressed by Ramos (1962) indicates that Mexicans may not hold a firm, unique idea of their own culture:

(1)t may be admitted that the only culture possible among us (Mexicans) must be of a derivative kind... Mexicans have been imitating for a long time, without actually realizing that they were imitating (p. 18).

An additional consideration is the level of abstraction ordinarily used by U.S. and Mexican children. Mercado, Díaz-Guerrero, and Gardner (1963) found evidence for the proposition that children's preferred level of abstraction is greater in the U.S. than it is in Mexico. Thus, the Mexican child might take closer note of and place greater importance on concrete, specific referents. Under the close scrutiny of the Mexican child, the specific TV content might, as indicated here, fail to meet the child's expectations of reality. The U.S. child, less concerned with specifics, might be less critical of the reality of concrete referents, centering rather on the more abstract elements.

For the predicted positive relationship between the function of relaxation of TV and PRTV, support was found with the U.S. sample but not with the Mexican one. It may be that this function is a relatively universal one that accompanies all other reasons for watching television, and it becomes one obvious socially acceptable response, in the case of the Mexican sample. In fact, in this study, the standard deviation for the distribution of this function was the lowest of all three functions investigated (2.07 vs. 2.21 and 2.31).

The fact that the influence of significant others was one of the best predictors of PRTV across both studies deserves further consideration. The results are quite straightforward if in fact the perception of the ISO by the child reflects the actual influence exercised over him. The issue that remains to be resolved is whether the children in a projective manner report the influence of their significant others to be consistent with their own views. If such is the case, this result may not be meaningful.
However, if the children do try to objectively estimate the influence they receive, we may have an even more powerful tool than the direct report of significant others with respect to their influence over a child. The way we perceive the messages is what theoretically should influence behavior, more so than the message as intended by the source.

The irregularities across both studies and within each study are suggestive. It may prove more fruitful to study individual types of referents (e.g., families, Americans, fights, etc.) in individual shows with respect to PRTV, rather than speak of PRTV too generally. The dimensions that a child uses for evaluating the reality of TV may vary from show to show, or from behavior to behavior portrayed (e.g., violence). The time dimension (Gordon, 1973), the context of the violence, the identification of the child with a character, etc., or a combination of the above may help explain marked differences in PRTV. While some of the variance has been explained by significant contributors (average \(-19\%\)), the study of the determinants of more specific PRTV issues, in detail, can be the best follow-up.

For the non-replicative part of this study, cultural differences may account for the lack of relationship between PRTV and aggressive predispositions. While we don’t know fully to what extent the Mexican culture approves of certain types of aggressive acts in comparison to Anglo-Saxon cultures, we may expect more tolerance for certain aggressive acts. The Mexican culture tolerates and even encourages aggression in males, including children. As Diaz-Guerrero (1975) has noted in commenting on the psychology of the Mexican, “During the entire childhood the sign of virility in the male is courage to the point of temerity, aggressiveness, and not to run away from a fight or break a deal (no rajarse)” (p. 5). Anderson, Anderson, Cohen, and Nutt (1959) found empirical evidence that children from Mexico are more likely than U.S., German, and English children to predict both verbal and physical punishment by teachers confronted with a child handing in a late homework assignment. The types of behavior measured in this study may simply not represent anti-social acts in the eyes of the Mexican children, and we may correspondingly find that the children, regardless of their PRTV of violence, manifest what we call aggressive predispositions. Perhaps the use of a wider range of aggressive options might have better differentiated among the Mexican children.

**CONCLUSION**

The relative success achieved in this study in predicting the perception of reality of television is emphasized, since a replication in a different culture has given generality to some of the findings.

The differences found suggest that more specific attempts be made to study PRTV. Concentrated efforts in one specific type of show, paying
closer attention to other possible intervening variables that may mediate PRTV (e.g., identification with a character) could be fruitful. Future endeavors should also attempt to tap cultural variables that may explain the differences and similarities in the predictability of PRTV. Reliable measurement across cultural boundaries is often problematic, and reactions to a particular measurement technique may vary across cultures. For example, Holtzman, Diaz-Guerrero, and Swartz (1975) found lower test–retest stability for Mexican children than for U.S. children on a variety of psychological measures.

Closer scrutiny of the kinds of experiences that a child has in his environment may lead to better predictability of the way in which the child interprets what he sees on the tube. One kind of experience that the child undergoes is the influence of his significant others. In this study, such influence as reported by the child has shown to be a strong determinant of the way in which the child decodes the messages that the media offers. More definite evidence is needed to show whether such influence, as reported by the child or by the significant others themselves, is in effect a principal determinant. If this is the case, parents and teachers would be the targets of attention by those who are in charge of setting policy priorities.

The determination of the dimensions on which children evaluate the reality of television is a further topic for consideration. Is reality evaluated according to very specific types of content, or in a more general manner? Is reality evaluated in terms of one’s own culture or a given culture being portrayed in television content?

In this study, no consistent evidence was found for a relationship between the perception of reality of TV violence and aggressive predispositions. It may be in fact that PRTV is not an issue of consideration by the child, or it may be that other variables should be explored which may interact with it for rendering the behavioral effects we hypothesized. Justification may be one such variable. If what is seen on TV is shown as justified, then it may be acceptable for imitation. Cultural origin of the content may be another variable. If TV violence is executed by characters of a different cultural or national origin, viewing of such content may not lead to modeled aggression, even if the violence is perceived as real.

Other effects of PRTV should be explored. Is helping behavior enhanced when helping on TV is perceived to be realistic? Do the sex roles portrayed on television, when perceived as real, promote stereotyping of the behavior of, for example, males and females? Is the male supposed to be “macho”? Is TV contributing to a “male” or “female” behavior, mediated perhaps by PRTV? Boys and girls may perceive TV to be equally real. However, they may learn different things, according to the sex of the characters, especially in a highly sex-differentiated culture such as that of Mexico.
PRTV, as well as exposure, may have cumulative effects, or effects over time. It may well be that what the children perceive to be real in their early years contributes to how they behave later in life. The perception of reality of television and its possible effects on the behavior of the receivers is by no means a concluded research endeavor, and the merit of replications across cultures has been demonstrated here by the discovery of similarities and differences across political and language boundaries.

REFERENCES


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**ABSTRACT TRANSLATIONS**

La Realité D'Apercevoir de Television et Les Predispositions Parmi Les Enfants de Mexique

**Abstract**

La réalité d'apercevoir de television parmi les enfants Mexican est examine, avec 300 enfants dans les ecoles de la Cité de Mexique comme les respondants. La prediction de la réalité d'apercevoir des experiences de la vie reel, l'exposition a, et la fonction et la satisfaction de la television, les demographiques, et le rapport entre la réalité d'apercevoir et les predispositions agressif de l'enfant est explore. Les similarites et dissimilarites sont equissent entre les decouvertes avec c'enchantillon Mexique et les enchantilons d'une etude anterier et simirar avec des enfants American. Dans les deux cultu4es, l'influence des autres significatif, et l'usage de la television pour la compagnie predire significativement la realite d'apercevoir. Les differences divers entre les deux cultures (e.g., l'importance du niveau d'abstraction pour le referent dans l'enchantillon Americain et pas dans l'etude Mexique) sont discutent.

**Extracto**

La Realidad Percibida en la Television y Predisposiciones Agresivas entre Ninos Mexicanos

Se examino en este estudio la realidad percibida en la television en 300 ninos en escuelas de la ciudad de Mexico. Se estudio la predicción de realidad percibida en la television a partir de experiencias de la vida real, exposicion a la TV, funciones y gratificaciones de la TV, variables demograficas, y contacto interpersonal. Tambien se exploró la relacion entre realidad percibida en la TV y las predisposiciones agresivas de los ninos. Las similitudes y diferencias entre este estudio con ninos mexicanos y otro anterior con ninos norteamericanos son comparados aqui. En ambas culturas, la influencia de otros significativos y el uso de la TV como compania predijeron de manera estadisticamente significativa la percepcion de realidad en la TV. Varias diferencias entre las dos culturas son discutidas, por ejemplo, la importancia del nivel de abstraccion del referente en TV para la muestra norteamericana y no asi para la mexicana.