Surveying Parental Mediation: Connections, Challenges and Questions for Media Literacy

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Abstract

This paper examines three strategies of parental mediation—coviewing, restrictive mediation, and active mediation—in order to make connections, challenge, and raise questions for media literacy. Coviewing, whether it is intentional practice, or whether it functions to promote media literacy, is explored. Restrictive mediation, how it connects to protectionism, and whether restriction serves as a form of media literacy is raised. Lastly, active mediation and whether it relates to an inquiry model of media literacy is discussed. The paper concludes with suggestions for future research on parental mediation and media literacy in the hopes of advancing parent media education.

Keywords: Parental Mediation, Coviewing, Restrictive Mediation, Active Mediation, Media Literacy, Parent Media Education, Television

Today's young people live in a media world, and parents face increasing challenges in managing their children's fast-changing and increasingly mobile media. Young people aged 8-18 spend 6.5 hours per day outside of school engaged with media (Roberts, Foehr, and Rideout 2005). Children are increasingly likely to have a television and computer in their bedrooms (Bovill and Livingstone 2001; Livingstone 2002), multitask with media (Foehr 2006), and use the Internet to communicate with others (Roberts et al. 1999).

Families have different norms for media use. Some families have strict rules about media, while other families pay little attention to what or how much media kids consume (Roberts et al. 2005). Young people aged 8-18 report spending 2 1⁄4 hours per day just "hanging out" with parents (Roberts et al. 2005), where watching television is the most common media families share together. Because children consume most media at home, it is important to consider the role of parents in guiding their children's use, understanding, and creation of media. Browne (1999, 31) highlights the importance of parents' intervention with their child's media use: "The majority of young children's experience of viewing television and videos takes place in their own homes and, therefore, parents are likely to help shape young children's perceptions of the status, value and enjoyment of televisual texts" (31).

To date, various solutions to help mitigate negative media effects of television on youth in the United Sates have been implemented through the work of advocacy groups, government, and the media industry. Governmental regulation of television includes the Children's Television Act of 1990 (CTA), which requires the FCC to enforce standards of educational programming on broadcast television, and the Telecommunications Act of 1996, which required the implementation of the V-Chip and a television ratings system. However, these solutions have been criticized. The V-Chip has been accused of failure due to poor design, inadequate marketing, and parents' lack of knowledge and confusion in how to use it (Hendershot 2002; Kunkel et al. 2002). Schmitt's (2000) study on how mothers were using the three-hour rule of the CTA and the V-Chip found that they did not use these policies in their mediation practices, but relied on their own preferences, experience, and children's preferences.

As ratings and regulatory systems for parents are not an effective "cure-all" solution for monitoring children's media, parents are under increased pressure to monitor their children's media use. Whereas media regulation has been the responsibility of the government and industry to restrict children's exposure, Livingstone (2002, 243) suggests a change in the conceptualization of regulation that emphasizes social norms in order to positively help children navigate the media world. The shift should be from "negative restrictive orientation" to "positive regulation, defined in terms of goals rather than dangers, part of the current interest in defending public service (and the public good), [and] children's rights to cultural expression and consumer empowerment."

The most comprehensive body of research on parenting strategies for children's media use is the literature of parental mediation. Parental mediation is "any strategy parents use to control, supervise, or interpret [media] content" for children and adolescents (Warren 2001, 212). Research on parental mediation has distinguished different types of mediation, what factors predict mediation, and what the effects are. Surprisingly, parental mediation and media literacy are two fields that have not often crossed paths. As parental mediation is situated in a media effects realm, it has failed to connect with concepts and principles of media literacy. Similarly, media literacy and the emerging field of parent media education lack conversation with the parental mediation literature. A conversation between the two fields would strengthen the understanding of parents' involvement with their children's media use.

There is little research on parent media literacy practices with their children. How parents enact media literacy with their children (whether they call it this), what kind of parents are likely engage in media literacy, what exactly they do, or with what kinds of effects on their children is unclear. It is important, then, to examine the literature of parental mediation to better understand what parents are doing and how they might be engaging in media literacy practices. Parental intervention in children's media consumption may strengthen children's media literacy skills in critical thinking about media messages they receive and create.

The conceptualization of media literacy used in this paper is based on an inquiry model, where media literacy is defined as the ability "to access, analyze, evaluate and communicate messages in a variety of forms" (Aufderheide 1993, xx). Media literacy expands traditional conceptualizations of literacy to include reading and writing through new communication tools, and offers a new way to learn through an "inquiry-based, process-oriented pedagogy" (Thoman and Jolls 2004, 21; Tyner 1998). Media literacy combines the analysis of media messages with the creation of media content, and expands the concept of literacy to include reading and writing media. Application of critical thinking skills and questions to assess both the content and creation of media serve as the foundation of media literacy.

The advocacy and practice of media literacy lies primarily in K-12 education. Of lesser concern is research on media literacy in the home and parental practices of media literacy with their children. Organizations including Common Sense Media, the Center for Media Literacy, the National Institute on Media in the Family, and the American Academy of Pediatrics have produced materials and offered programs for parents encouraging them to become involved with their children's media use (oftentimes for the goal of mitigating negative media effects.) However, little is known about the effectiveness of these programs, how they are used, or their effects on children. It is helpful, then, to review the different forms of parental mediation to examine their effectiveness as media literacy practices.

This paper provides a deeper examination of the three main forms of parental mediation in order to connect to, challenge, and question principles within media literacy. Although the mediation literature does not explicitly indicate how different types of mediation serve to promote media literacy skills, there are strategies that illustrate both connections and challenges to theory and pedagogy of media literacy. First, an overview of parental mediation is provided. Next, the three main types of mediation—coviewing, restrictive mediation, and active mediation—are explored more deeply to connect to and challenge media literacy, prompting questions, concerns, and areas of needed research. To conclude, the paper recommends areas of needed research in parental mediation and media literacy. Delving into the different types of parental mediation through a media literacy lens will help inform parent media education programs. Likewise, making connections to parental mediation from media literacy will help researchers who study mediation consider how to connect to media literacy theory and practices in meaningful ways. The aim is for this

essay to inspire more questions than answers, and to highlight the important need for research on parents and media literacy.

An Overview of Parental Mediation

Parental mediation has been described as one of the most effective ways in managing television's influence on children (Buijzen and Valkenburg 2005). The interest in parental mediation research, mostly based in the United States, rose in the 1980s when deregulation was in effect and standards of children's television were low. Mediation research continued in the 1990s when increasing emphasis was placed on parents' responsibility for media in the home, especially as the government moved the responsibility of youth media intervention from the media industry to parents and educators (Livingstone 2002). The parental mediation literature is situated within a media effects paradigm, drawing on developmental psychology and cognitive development perspectives. Research on parental mediation explores how parents' interaction with their children's media use can serve as a tool to mitigate negative media effects on children's physical, psychological, and emotional health.

There is a lack of consensus in defining the term mediation that has contributed to ambiguities in the literature. Researchers have examined a variety of techniques labeled differently and measured in different ways (Potter 2004). Bybee, Robinson, and Turow (1982) were the first researchers to develop a multidimensional concept of mediation, calling the dimensions restrictive, evaluative, and unfocused. Although researchers have used different definitions and measures of mediation, most of the research shows the same three patterns of mediation as "any strategy parents use to control, supervise, or interpret content" (Warren 2001, 212).

Nathanson (2002) and colleagues (Nathanson and Botta 2003) provide clear and consistent definitions of a three-dimensional framework of parental mediation in their research, categorized as either coviewing, restrictive mediation, or active mediation. More studies are adopting this three-dimensional framework of mediation (Austin et al. 1999; Nathanson 1999). According to Nathanson and Yang (2005, 1), coviewing refers to "the simple act of watching television with children" without discussion about its content or use. Restrictive mediation is "setting rules on children's television consumption" such as the type of content or the amount of time. Active media-

tion, also known as discussion, refers to talking with children about television, such discussing programs, content, and advertising. Parents' use of active mediation has shown promising results in strengthening children's critical thinking skills about television, as well as protecting them from negative media effects.

There are several factors that predict whether or why parents mediate, as well as what type of mediation style they use. The strongest and most consistent predictive factor of mediation is parent attitude toward television and a parent's belief about the positive or negative effects of television (St. Peters et al. 1991; Valkenburg el al. 1999; Warren 2001). Parents who believe that television may have negative effects on their children are more likely to mediate (Valkenburg et al. 1999; Warren, Gerke, and Kelly 2002; Weaver and Barbour 1992), and parents with positive attitude toward television see it as a useful tool and a way to reinforce positive lessons (Austin et al. 1999). Parents are also more likely to use mediation—especially restrictive and active—with younger children rather than preteens or teenagers (Austin, Knaus, and Meneguelli 1997; Buckingham 1993; Chan and McNeal 2003; Valkenburg et al. 1999; Weaver and Barbour 1992). Mothers engage in more mediation overall than fathers (Buckingham 1993; Pasquier 2001; Valkenburg et al. 1999; Warren 2001), and parents are more likely to mediate for girls than boys (Weaver and Barbour 1992). Other important factors in mediation include parent accessibility, engagement, and involvement (Warren 2001; Warren et al. 2002); family communication style, disciplinary style, and parenting style (Buijzen and Valkenburg 2005; Fujioka and Austin 2002; Warren 2001; Weaver and Barbour 1992); and cultural differences (Chan and McNeal 2003).

In addition, the number and location of televisions in the home and the way the family uses social space influences parental mediation practices (Buckingham 1993; Weaver and Barbour 1992). Livingstone (2002) found that children increasingly have televisions and computers in their bedrooms, which could hinder mediation due to location and privacy. In Westernized nations, many children live in media-saturated homes where they are increasingly likely to have media in their bedrooms, making their media consumption more individualized and private (Lenhart, Rainie, and Lewis 2001; Livingstone 2002; Livingstone and Bovill 2001), adding an additional two hours per day of exposure (Roberts et al. 2005). The privatization and individualization of media "may

reduce both the amount and the quality of experiences families share in common and limit the exchange of information and perspectives" (Bachen 2007, 244). Although coviewing, restrictive mediation, and active mediation could potentially be applied to other forms of media, the majority of mediation research is limited to television, with emerging research on video game mediation (Nikken and Jansz 2006) and Internet mediation (Eastin, Greenberg, and Hofschire 2006; Lee and Chae 2007; Livingstone and Helsper 2008; Youn 2008). Differences in mediation are emerging for video games and the Internet, so this paper focuses on television mediation, which has established a three-dimensional framework of mediation styles.

Coviewing, Restrictive Mediation, and Active Mediation: Connections, Challenges, and Questions for Media Literacy

Scholars cannot yet predict why certain kids of mediation are associated with certain effects (Nathanson, 1999, 2001a). Although it is difficult to generalize the causes and effects of mediation (Nathanson 2001b), active mediation appears to be the most promising type, as it has shown positive outcomes: learning more from educational television and increasing pro-social behavior (Nathanson 2002); more skepticism towards television news (Austin 1993); more engagement in political socialization (Austin and Pinkleton 2001); decreased aggression (Nathanson 1999); reduced effects of advertising (Buijzen and Valkenburg 2005); positive body image (Nathanson and Botta 2003); and lessened the negative effects of violent and sexual content with teens (Strasburger and Wilson 2002). However, Nathanson and Botta (2003, 325) note that the effectiveness of active mediation may depend on the nature of the content and how parents communicate. They recommend future research explore what parents say," the actual content of parents' mediation."

The parental mediation literature, although it identifies mediation styles and examines the effects on children, fails to connect to research and practices from media literacy. Likewise, media literacy research and programs for parents can draw on what is known about parental mediation. This section will explain what the research says about the three types of mediation: coviewing, restrictive mediation, and active mediation. Within each section, connections, challenges, and questions for media literacy are discussed.

Coviewing

Coviewing, or watching television with children without discussion (Nathanson 1999), has been argued as a deliberate, conscious form of mediation by some, and just coincidence or behavioral ritual without intention by others (Warren et al. 2002). In fact, coviewing has the least clarity in the literature of the three types of mediation (Nathanson 2001a). While coviewing was found to occur more often than active mediation (Valkenburg et al. 1999), other researchers found coviewing was rarely practiced (Dorr, Kovaric, and Doubleday 1989). Parents with positive attitudes toward television often used coviewing and encouraged children to watch specific types of programs (Austin et al. 1999; Nathanson 2001c).

Coviewing has inconclusive effects on attitudinal and behavioral change of children. On the one hand, coviewing increases children's enjoyment of programs because children like viewing television with their parents (Nathanson 1999; RobbGrieco and Hobbs 2009). Coviewing was also found to be influential in the political socialization process, although negative active mediation had more of an impact (Austin and Pinkelton 2001). On the other hand, parents who coview objectionable television content (such as sex, violence, and drugs) with their adolescents encourage them to develop similar viewing habits (Nathanson 2002). In fact, coviewing may actually increase the likelihood of negative media effects such as aggression because parents' lack of discussion serves as a sort of "silent positive endorsement" of the content (Nathanson 1999, 2001b). Nathanson (1999, 129) explains, "when parents coview negative material and do not say anything that contradicts what is shown, children may interpret their parents' presence as a sign that they approve of the content and think TV viewing is a valuable, useful activity." Thus, Nathanson (2001b, 217) recommends "parents should be aware that the popular advice to 'watch television with your children' may produce undesirable effects if parents do not contradict the negative messages that are coviewed."

Although many parents report coviewing, it does not seem to be a strategy that promotes media literacy. Coviewing does not seem to encourage critical reflection because there is simply no discussion about media, as Austin et al. (1999, 189) found "coviewing and critical or analytical parental discussion of content are conceptually distinct" and that "coviewing is more likely to relate to positive media-

tion—noncritical discussion that reinforces television content—than to negative mediation." It seems that coviewing lacks the intention from parents to view with a purpose. However, Nathanson and Yang (2005) challenged the conceptualization of coviewing as unintentional. They measured motivational aspects of coviewing in parents of children in grades K-6, where they specified motivation as intentional or passive. Intentional coviewing includes "watch[ing] children's entertainment programs or educational programs together with their children with the benefit of the child in mind" whereas passive coviewing is parents "watch[ing] children's entertainment programs or educational programs together with their children for fun and enjoyment" (Nathanson and Yang 2005, 13, 14). They found that parents tend to coview more intentionally when watching children's entertainment programming, and found no difference among intentional or passive for educational programming. They also found that parents of young children used more intentional coviewing, especially for entertainment content. Thus, even though some coviewing may be intentional, it is unclear whether coviewing serves to strengthen critical viewing skills.

Coviewing and Media Literacy. The literature on coviewing connects to media literacy in two ways. The first is that coviewing is the most common form of parental mediation, and as Nathanson and Yang (2005) found, there can be motivational differences in coviewing as intentional or passive. There is opportunity, then, for parents to engage in active mediation to promote media literacy with their children when they are coviewing—especially at times of intentional coviewing. Perhaps it would be helpful for parents to be aware of different kinds of viewing (intentional or passive) and reflect on their motivations for viewing. Research on media literacy in the home needs to explore how parents are motivated to move from coviewing to active mediation and discussion.

A second issue that is important to media literacy is Nathanson's (1999, 2001b) finding that coviewing can function as a kind of "silent endorsement" of television content or use. Parents who coview may not signal that they approve or disapprove of certain television content or the amount of use, as Fujioka and Austin (2003, 430) note, "There seems to be a danger that what a child observes and learns from a parent may not necessarily reflect what a parent wants their child to observe and learn." This finding highlights the importance of parents making their opinions

known (active mediation) by sharing values about media content with their children (Fujioka and Austin 2003), and becoming aware of their media habits and what they might be modeling to their children. Austin et al. (1999, 190) warn that "advising parents to watch television with their children is insufficient to make mediation positive or negative and at times may be counterproductive advice, if the intent is to cultivate critical viewing skills in children." Although it s important that parents coview with their children, this can have a negative effect depending on the content that is viewed and the nature of use.

Restrictive Mediation

Restrictive mediation is parents' use of rules and limitations on their children's use of television, including the types of programming and content they are allowed to watch (Nathanson 1999). Although parents report using restrictive mediation, unfocused mediation (similar to coviewing), is probably used most frequently (Valkenburg et al. 1999; Weaver and Barbour 1992). Other studies show that parents primarily use restrictive mediation, where viewing rules are enforced (Warren 2001; Weaver and Barbour 1992), although there is mixed evidence on whether it is effective. There are also differences in children's reports of restrictive mediation. For instance, 49% of children said they have no rules for television, and 42% of those children report that television is on most of the time in their house (Roberts et al. 1999). Similarly, Livingstone and Bovill (1999) found that three in four parents report telling their child when they can or cannot watch television and videos, however, only one in three children say their parents do this. According to Roberts et al., (2005) 46% of youth report their families have no rules about TV use, and this percentage increases as children get older. In fact, it is estimated that 25% of 8-18 year-olds live in "high TV orientation" homes where there are no rules about TV viewing and where the TV is on most of the time. Restrictive mediation is used more with younger children, girls, low-income families, and parents who believe in a preponderance of negative media effects (Buckingham 1993; Nathanson 2001b; Pasquier 2001). Parents who use restrictive mediation watch less entertainment programming and less television overall (St. Peters et al. 1991). Accordingly, parental attitude toward media is a predictor for restrictive mediation. Nathanson's (2001b) study of 394 parents and their second through sixth-grade children found that restrictive mediation signaled parent disapproval

of violent television, whereas active mediation and coviewing served as endorsements of violent content. This is due to restrictive mediation being "strongly predicted by the perception that violent television might be harmful to children . . .. [and that] parents who enforce rules have an inherent dislike of violent content for themselves [emphasis in original]" (Nathanson 2001b, 214).

Similarly, Buckingham's (1993, 105) interviews with parents of children aged seven to twelve found that most parents had an "anti-television" stance and "saw it as their responsibility to restrict and regulate their children's viewing, although in some cases they admitted that they were not wholly successful in doing so." Buckingham also found a social desirability bias in parents' self-reports, as parents may report restrictive behavior to fit the image of a good, responsible parent—despite fact that their children report they receive less restriction than parents state, and claim they often easily get around parents' rules. In a survey of parents and children about media use in the home, Pasquier (2001) found that restriction is placed mostly on telephone and television, but control is inefficient because children who faced restrictions were just as likely as other children to be heavy media users. Interviews with parents reveal that media restriction is difficult to implement, and interviews with children about parental control show that children know their parents' arguments about restriction very well and early on, and they have figured out ways to get around the rules. As Pasquier notes, children see media restriction as "doing forbidden things, or not following the rules exactly, is a way of showing that you are grown up," so "The game of media rules, for a child, is a way of learning more about the adult world, and the backstage of parents' lives" (ibid., 173). In addition, Nathanson (2002) found that adolescents whose parents used restrictive mediation had a decrease in positive attitudes about them because they believed their parents did not trust them, and furthermore, they also had more positive attitudes toward the content, and exhibited more positive attitudes toward viewing restricted content with friends. Nathanson argues that parents who use restrictive mediation may be doing more harm than good.

Based on the inconsistent nature of implementing and enforcing restrictive mediation, and the discrepancies in reports from parents and their children, the effectiveness of restrictive mediation is debatable (Buckingham 1993). Most parents who say they use restriction actually do little regulating, and what they do to regulate is somewhat ineffective (St. Peters et al. 1991). In a meta-analysis of the impact of parental mediation on children, Allen, Burrell, and Timmerman (2006) found restrictive mediation has been linked to outcomes of children watching slightly less television. Mixed results in the effectiveness of restrictive mediation was found by Nathanson (1999), in which very high or very low levels of restricted mediation were connected with more aggression of adolescents, but a moderate amount of restrictive mediation was related to less aggression. In a study of eight to twelve-year-old children and their parents, Buijzen and Valkenburg (2005) found that the use of restrictive mediation for mitigating the negative effects for advertising did less to empower children to think critically for themselves than active mediation.

Restrictive mediation and media literacy. Even though the research on parental mediation shows that restrictive mediation has mixed results, parents rely on it as a useful—and familiar—strategy. Having rules about what children can do or watch, and for how long is a cornerstone to many parents who aim to monitor their children's media use. Rules and restrictions are also familiar to children who are exposed to conventions and regulations in the school and community. Media control in the form of rules can be seen as a way for parents to communicate family morals to children because it involves judgments about media and family life (Pasquier 2001).

It is important to note that using restriction, rules, and limits on media is a strategy that is commonly recommended to parents (Hogan 2001, Steyer 2002, Strausburger and Wilson 2002), and that has a history within a protectionist approach to media education. A protectionist approach to media education for parents took hold in the 1970s, from Marie Winn's (1977) famous book The Plug in Drug, to Peggy Charren's move from a concerned mother to forming Action for Children's Television, a group that pushed the media industry and government for higher quality children's television, and who helped to pass the Children's Television Act of 1990. Although the Motion Picture Association of America had established film ratings since 1968, during the 1990s ratings systems were developed (primarily for parents' use to protect children), including the V-Chip and television ratings system, Parental Advisory sticker for music albums, and Entertainment Software Rating Board system for video games. Currently there is not an established

or universal rating system for the Internet, although there are numerous options for filtering, blocking, and monitoring tools available.

Furthermore, strategies frequently recommended by parent media education advocates suggest restriction as a useful strategy. For instance, Steyer (2002, 199) recommends "Set a media diet and stick to it," "Set clear rules regarding your child's media use in other homes," and "Switch the dial to 'off'"; Walsh (1994) advises limiting the use of TV, establishing ground rules, and keeping the television out of kids' rooms; and the American Academy of Pediatrics (2001, 424) recommends that parents "limit children's total media time (with entertainment media) to no more than 1 to 2 hours of quality programming per day." Although restriction is not the only advice recommended to parents, it is clearly common advice within parent media education. Limiting exposure seems like the easiest way to protect children.

Parents who have an anxiety and dislike of popular culture and media are drawn to protectionism, and it is an easy way to "sell" them on the idea of media literacy (Hobbs 1998; Kubey, 2003). Hobbs (1998, 19) notes that protectionism is "often exploited simply for its rhetorical value in conveying to parents and community members the relevance of media literacy education in schools." Kubey (2003) claims that parents are more likely than teachers to see media literacy as a preventative measure.

Thus, the recommendation of restrictive mediation to parents as a useful strategy begs several questions for the field of media literacy: Is restriction part of media literacy? Should media literacy practitioners recommend restriction to parents as a "media literacy" strategy? Does restriction function only to protect children from negative media effects, or does it have other outcomes? Is there a place in media literacy for restrictive mediation, and if so, where is it, in what situations should be advocated, and for whom? These questions speak more deeply to the theoretical foundations of the purpose, means, and goal of media literacy education. The field of media literacy in the United States has been praised—and criticized—for its diverse goals, motives, and instructional practices (Hobbs 1998). There are many stakeholders in the media literacy movement who come from diverse fields, including teachers, after-school educators, religious educators, media producers, media professionals, concerned citizens, and parents. Although the definitions and purposes of media literacy have been

debated (Buckingham 1998; Hobbs 1998), the debate over its aims and goals has been particularly significant in the United States.

The split between those who see media literacy as a means of protection from media effects and those who do not was highlighted as one of Hobbs's (1998, 18) "seven great debates" of media literacy: "Should media literacy education aim to protect children and young people from negative media influences?" A protectionist stance in media literacy focuses on mitigating the negative impact of media on youth, counteracting harmful messages, and reducing risk on health and well-being, and a protectionist stance is "most prevalent among those who do not directly work in school settings"(ibid., 19). Rules, limitations, and regulation are strategies advocated in order to protect children from negative media effects.

Hobbs's (2008, 437) revisit of the "great debates" found that four distinct approaches have emerged, and that protectionism has moved into its own "tent" "with its own proponents, scholarly literature, conferences, and practitioner base." Hobbs labels this distinct approach as media management, which includes "Scholars and researchers with interests in youth, media and public health" that "resist the conceptualization of media literacy as a new type of literacy or a particular approach to pedagogy, preferring to conceptualize media literacy as a treatment or intervention to counteract negative media effects" (ibid., 436). Media management is not just protection, however, because "this perspective emphasizes the importance of transforming passive, habitual media use in to intentional, active and strategic use as a response to the negative dimensions of mass media and popular culture" (ibid., 436). Media literacy, it is argued, is a distinct approach from media management, though the two "tents" still share ideas. Hobbs sticks with the widely used definition of media literacy as the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and communicate to "emphasize an understanding of mass media and popular culture, particularly news, advertising, entertainment and popular culture" (ibid., 434). Based on Hobbs's distinction of media management as separate from media literacy, with concerns of protecting youth from negative media effects (with restriction as a method to accomplish this), where, if at all, does restriction fit into media literacy?

Critics of protectionism note that children are framed as victims of media without attention paid to the pleasures and positive outcomes of media consumption (Buckingham 2003), while others do not want medical

professionals recommending appropriate consumption and content (Hobbs 2008). Others believe social science research methods and theoretical models—the basis of most research on parental mediation—are ineffective in exploring the complex relationship of media in the lives of young people (Buckingham 2003). Jenkins's (2006) model of new media literacies highlights an appreciation of children's pleasure in fan culture, gaming, and popular culture (Jenkins 2006, 61). Jenkins states that parents need to avoid getting trapped in anxiety about the changing landscape of children's media and participatory culture, but that "parents play important roles in helping them make meaningful choices in their use of media and helping them anticipate the consequences of the choices they make."

Based on the mixed results for restriction in the parental mediation research, coupled with restriction as a strategy commonly recommended to parents to protect children, it is important to consider what the purpose and goals are for restriction within media literacy, and whether restriction should be recommended by media literacy practitioners as a strategy for parents that serves to promote media literacy. As media becomes less passive and more interactive, less mass and more personalized, more converged and mobile, and a more ingrained part of children's lives, considering the purpose and outcomes of restriction is important for media literacy. If media literacy practitioners recommend restriction, what strategies should be advocated? Should different kinds of restriction be categorized—such as limiting content versus amount of time—similar to Nathanson and Yang's (2005) clarification of different types of coviewing? What kind of restriction should be advocated for which ages and developmental levels? Aside from protection against media effects, what are other effects of restriction (i.e., promoting awareness of media consumption habits, self-regulation, or balancing on-screen with off-screen activities)? As media literacy moves forward to branch out beyond educational settings and into the home, how and whether restriction functions to promote media literacy needs further consideration.

Active Mediation

Active mediation, the type of mediation most closely aligned with media literacy, is shown to be most effective type of parental mediation (Fujioka and Austin 2002; Livingstone 2002; Nathanson 1999; Pasquier 2001). Nathanson (2002) has categorized active mediation as either positive, negative, or neutral. Positive active mediation refers to parents endorsing or praising the television content (Nathanson and Botta 2003). Negative active mediation refers to parental judgment or critique of television messages, such as discussing the negative effects of advertising techniques or violent content (Fujioka and Austin 2002; Nathanson and Botta 2003). Parents may use a combination of positive and negative active mediation, or they may exhibit neutral active mediation, which refers to discussion that cannot be classified as positive or negative in tone (Nathanson 2002). As Fujioka and Austin (2002) note, some of these comments aren't purposive but are a part of everyday conversation. Therefore, it is unclear as to whether active mediation is intentionally used by parents to help their children think critically, or used passively as a part of social conversation.

The few studies on the effects of active mediation on children's attitudes and behavior point to positive outcomes. Even though parents were found more likely to ignore the content or change the channel than to discuss offensive content with their child (Austin 1993), active mediation has been recommended to be the most effective form of parental television mediation (Nathanson 1999). Talking with children seems a more effective way to guide children than exercising restrictions on viewing (Livingstone 2002; Pasquier 2001). For instance, children of parents who use active mediation learn more from educational television content and experience positive outcomes on social behavior (Nathanson 2002). Active mediation increased skepticism towards television news (Austin 1993). Negative active mediation was shown to influence a child's political socialization (Austin and Pinkelton 2001). Negative active mediation and restriction decreased children's generalized aggression and television-induced aggression, as both "work by first influencing children's perceived importance of violent TV. . .to socialize children into an orientation toward violent TV that makes them less vulnerable to its negative effects" (Nathanson 1999, 137). Parents of teenagers, for instance, can counteract violent or sexual content only if they "watch such content with teens and explain their own views. Clear explanations of parents' values and expectations—even if they are conservative ones—are useful and protective for teenagers" (Strasbruger and Wilson 2002, 411).

Children who have parents with higher levels of involvement with their media feel more positive

about talking with parents about media (RobbGrieco and Hobbs 2009). Children note that they enjoy talking to parents about media, as one student remarked, "I like it because I will know if they don't want me to play, visit, read or listen to that thing," and another reflected, "I like talking to my parents about that kind of stuff to see what we have in common. I feel close to them when I'm talking to them about that kind of stuff" (RobbGrieco and Hobbs 2009, 8)

Although the findings on the effectiveness of active mediation are promising, and the research explains what parents are doing, more research is needed to discern how different types of active mediation (positive, negative, and neutral) serve different functions, particularly whether they serve to increase media literacy skills in children. Additionally, research within the fields of parental mediation or media literacy has not explored the effectiveness of parent media education programs, most which advocate the active mediation strategy of "talk with your children about media." If active mediation is shown to have promising effects on children, it needs to be explored as a strategy to promote media literacy.

Active mediation and media literacy. Using declarative statements in active mediation—whether they are positive or negative—is a way for parents to demonstrate their values and beliefs about media in order to influence the values of their child. (It is not clear how neutral active mediation would serve this function.) Active mediation is comprised of parents' positive and negative statements of observation, judgment, or value, which serves as a form of socialization about what is appropriate or inappropriate content and use of media, and also a form of protection (Strasburger and Wilson 2002).

Nathanson and Botta's (2003) categorization of active mediation as positive, negative, or neutral help to classify and explain what parents say in active mediation. Examples of positive active mediation include saying, "I love this show" or "He sure is cool" (309). Negative active mediation examples include statements such as, "That's not real" or "That show is wrong" (308). Examples of neutral active mediation include statements like, "What do you think will happen next?" or "This show is filmed in New York" (309). Austin et al. (1999) found that positive mediation might occur more by chance, where negative mediation is practiced with more intention of protection and critical viewing.

Based on what is known about the use of declarative statements in the form of positive or negative active mediation, and the principle of inquiry as central to the media literacy model, two issues are raised. These issues challenge and question both the fields of parental mediation and media literacy, and indicate a need for further research in both areas.

The first issue that is important for media literacy is whether and how the use of declarative, value-laden statements by parents function to promote media literacy skills in children. It is unclear how parents use inquiry and questioning as a form of active mediation. Nathanson and Botta (2003, 309) provide the example, "What do you think will happen next?" as a form of neutral mediation. Does this mean that inquiry is a type of neutral mediation, and if so, how is this different from a neutral declarative statements such as "This show is filmed in New York"? (ibid., 309).

The use of inquiry is central to media literacy, which advocates learning through an "inquiry-based, process-oriented pedagogy" (Thoman and Jolls 2004, 21). Most advocates agree that critical inquiry--the asking of questions about media texts--is the "center pole of the media literacy umbrella" (Hobbs 1998, 27) and that critical inquiry is the foundation of media literacy (Alvermann and Hagood 2000; Brown, Schaffer, Vargas, and Romocki 2004; Hobbs 1998; Pailliotet et al., 2000; Rogow 2004; Silverblatt 2004; Thoman and Jolls 2004; Tyner 1998). The "Five Key Questions" and "Five Core Concepts" of media literacy are widely used as an introduction and foundation to media literacy inquiry (Share, Jolls, and Thoman 2005; Thoman and Jolls 2005), and the National Association for Media Literacy Education recommend the use of questions to explore the core principles of media literacy (NAMLE 2007).

Inquiry involves open, reflective, and critical questioning toward media messages (Hobbs 1998) and encourages critical autonomy where the goal is "for each individual to develop his or her own increasingly sophisticated and complex responses to and interpretations of media" (Kubey 2003, 368). If a function of critical inquiry is to encourage independent thinking and critical thought, it is important for researchers to explore how inquiry fits with the active mediation framework, and how parents can use it to promote media literacy skills in children. How can parents use questioning effectively to promote media literacy skills in their children? Researchers need to

explore exactly what parents are saying and doing to encourage children's critical analysis (and creation) of media. Nathanson (2001b) recommends that future research in parental mediation focus on measuring the three types of active mediation and how they are correlated with television content so that specific mediation practices can be linked to specific media content. For instance, negative active mediation may be more effective for violent content, if the goal is to condone or disapprove, whereas positive active mediation with a goal may be more effective with pro-social content to endorse pro-social messages. But in addition to understanding how specific content is endorsed or condoned, also needed is an understanding of how inquiry is used by parents to promote critical thinking about media. Although the concern of parental mediation is to mitigate negative media effects, research is needed on how media literacy inquiry is used and with what effect.

A second issue that active mediation raises for media literacy is the pedagogical approach, if it can be labeled as such, of parents' use of positive and negative statements as active mediation. Parents sharing their values and beliefs with their children is a normal part of the child-rearing and socialization process. Yet the practice of sharing values and beliefs about media stands in contrast to research on the pedagogical approach of media literacy educators. If parents' use of active mediation—particularly negative mediation—is a form of protection, this approach does not work as well with teachers. Media literacy educators—particularly K-12 teachers—are advised to be neutral with their students and use less sharing of personal values about media. Teachers who use a pedagogical approach of protection often face resistance from students because "media literacy skills are positioned in opposition to media culture" (Hobbs, 1998,19). Furthermore, endorsing values connotes a "right" and "wrong" way to understand media, and this becomes problematic when a teacher approaches the child audience as the "hero—who as all the right answers and right readings" of a texts (Hobbs 2008, 9). Media educators advocate a different pedagogical orientation and instructional techniques, including rejecting the traditional notion of teacher as authority, and the teacher as having the "right" answers.

However, although parents likely use inquiry as a form of active mediation, they also rely on endorsing what they believe is "right" or "wrong." Parents and children operate in a family context with different relationships and power dynamics than a classroom. Moreover, parents need different strategies to enact media literacy with their children that can be used in everyday life, which are not based within curriculum and standards, and that are not too teacher-like in tone.

Knowing that parents do not rely on the same pedagogical approach as educators, and that parents rely on different techniques than educators, the field of media literacy needs to explore these differences. Media literacy needs to speak to the current mediation strategies of parents, including endorsing personal values and beliefs. The research on active mediation does not reflect—nor does it draw from—a model of inquiry that is so central to media literacy education. Exploring more of the "what is said" of active mediation strategies, discerning how inquiry is used in active mediation, and researching what kinds of active mediation are most effective in promoting media literacy would help advance both fields. In turn, parent media education programs will advance, providing the best advice for parents to not only protect their children from media effects, but also empower their children to practice critical thinking about media consumption and creation.

To summarize, active mediation raises issues about the function of sharing values and beliefs in promoting media literacy, the pedagogical approach taken by the parents, and how the inquiry model of media literacy fits into a model of positive, negative or neutral active mediation.

Limitations and Emerging Research

This paper is limited in that it is focused on television mediation, which is what most of the parental mediation research has examined. An obvious opportunity for future research is to explore how parents mediate with different forms of media (Potter 2004). Emerging research is starting to examine mediation for other forms of media, such as video games (Nikken and Jansz 2006) and the Internet (Eastin et al. 2006; Lee and Chae 2007, Livingstone and Helsper 2008, Youn 2008). Eastin et al. (2006) found that one of the major differences in Internet mediation versus television mediation is critically evaluating online content, and how it can be created, manipulated, and forced on the user. Livingstone and Helsper (2008) found that parents are attempting a range of mediation strategies, adapting from television strategies, where they prefer active co-use to technical restrictions, in-

teraction restrictions, and monitoring practices. However, increased mediation was not found to decrease risks, as they state, "The simple assumption that introducing forms of parental mediation will reduce the risks young people encounter online, especially while protecting their opportunities, is misguided" (2008, 597). Thus, this introduces a challenge for media literacy educators to find the most effective media education advice for parents, "for those seeking to protect children and young people while supporting their online activities more generally" (Livingstone and Helsper, 597). Research is currently inconclusive on whether the three-dimensional framework for television mediation can transfer to other media (Nikken and Jansz 2006, Youn 2008), or whether there are shifting forms of mediation for the Internet, as Eastin et al. (2006) and Livingstone and Helsper (2008) discern. Adding to concern, Pasquier (2001) found that European children are more likely to talk about television and less likely to talk about computers with their parents. Examining a variety of media technologies and parental mediation styles is especially important in new media environments where children are spending a lot of time with media other than television (Livingstone and Bovill 2001).

Another limitation of this paper is that it focused on the three mediation strategies themselves, rather than what factors influence whether and how parents mediate, such as demographics, accessibility and engagement (Warren 2001), social patterns in the home (Pasquier 2001), family communication patterns (Weaver and Barbour 1992), intention (Allen et al 2006; Nathanson and Yang 2005), and knowledge or tools for active mediation (Chan And McNeal 2003), many of which were mentioned in the overview of mediation earlier in the paper. Exploring how such factors influence parental mediation style and media literacy practices would help advance and perhaps better tailor recommendations to parents.

Conclusion and Areas of Future Research

To conclude, this article has attempted to explore the parental mediation practices of coviewing, restrictive mediation, and active mediation in order to make connections to media literacy in ways that challenge both fields. Examining parental mediation not only informs initiatives in parent media education, but also raises several issues to consider within the field of media literacy. Coviewing, although not explicitly a form of media literacy, offers the opportunity for parents to enact active mediation practices, but parents should also be forewarned of the potential adverse effects of "silent endorsement" in coviewing. Whether or not restrictive mediation is effective needs more exploration, as well questioning how restriction fits into media literacy, whether it can promote media literacy skills, and more specifically what kinds of restriction parent media educators should recommend to parents (particularly because it is commonly advised to parents). Active mediation informs media literacy that parents' use of value statements (positive, negative, or neutral) about media can have positive effect on their children (particularly to protect them from media effects), but less is understood about how parents use inquiry as a form of active mediation. Differences in the purpose, means, and goals of media literacy for parents and educators influences how it is practiced with children.

Potter (2004) suggests that mediation needs a taxonomy to organize various techniques so that researchers can design measures to test the effectiveness of different techniques and more easily design instruction for parents. A taxonomy would indicate which mediation techniques under which conditions work best for which children, and such a taxonomy could be connected to outcomes in media literacy. While parental mediation researchers continues to explore what strategies parents currently use, a missing piece is examining how parents respond to media literacy approaches, programs, materials, advice, and recommended techniques. Research in these areas will advance more effective media literacy curriculum, program, and outreach for parents. The field of media literacy needs to help parents use mediation in ways that encourage media literacy skills in their children.

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