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Recent years have seen an increase in research investigating the latent content of television programs, "those subtle messages that may be independent of plot" (McLeod, Fitzpatrick, Glynn, & Fallis, 1982, p. 277). Such research is particularly important since, as Weaver and Wakshlag (1986) point out, the presentation of factual information by media, in the form of news/documentary or fiction, is one of three usual sources of information for most people. Weaver and Wakshlag (1986) explain that social perceptions are formed and reinforced by lower order information, such as mass media, when higher order direct experience, such as direct personal experience or experiences of others conveyed through interpersonal relationships, is lacking or ambiguous. Social learning theory (e.g., Bandura & Walters, 1963; Tan, 1986), cultivation theory (e.g., Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1980, 1981, 1982, 1986), and the perspective of symbolic interactionism (Ellis, Streeter, & Engelbrecht, 1983) suggest that individuals' stereotypes, role learning, aggression and "world views" can be influenced by observing life on television. Jeffres (1986) asserts that the majority of social scientists would agree that television has a powerful impact on children's perceptions and imitative learning (p. 213). It is reasonable to assume that adults also learn and reinforce values, attitudes, and behavior portrayed on television.

The focus of the present study is the portrayal of familial interpersonal relationships on television. Even though direct experience within family relationships may be an individual's primary source of information about relational interaction, such information could be supplemented by observing family interactions that occur on television. McLeod et al. (1982) suggest that television family interactions are likely to affect real life family interactions because "there are large areas of family functioning that are not governed by societal norms but rather operate from rules fashioned in the processes of family interaction. It is likely that, when societal norms are absent, family members will accept behaviors seen on television as legitimate" (p. 276).

Television portrayals of families provide specific information about family interaction and family roles (Greenberg, Hines, Buerkel-Rothfuss, & Atkin, 1980) and may play an important part in the formation of expectations about appropriate or effective behavior within the parent-child relationship (Dail & Way, 1985; Greenberg et al., 1980). Moreover, Greenberg et al. (1980) contend that the implications of learning about family interaction from television are more immediate than the implications of learning about other social roles from television. "For example, if a child learns about the role of the police in the cultural system, the opportunity for actual behavior or interaction with the police will probably be many years in the future. In the case of family interaction, the arena for testing newly acquired attitudes is directly and pervasively accessible" (Greenberg et al., 1980, p. 158).

The symbolic interactionism perspective taken by Ellis, Streeter, and Engelbrecht (1983) supports the notion of role learning from television "significant others." They hypothesize that viewers perceive some television characters and personalities as particularly salient and that viewers can, and do, take these roles. Viewers may evaluate their attitudes and actions from their perceptions of the perspectives of TV others. This process of TV role taking can occur both in viewing and nonviewing contexts. Thus, the skills that are learned can be generalized to other life situations and relationships. Ellis et al.(1983) point out that if portrayals of roles on television are inaccurate by being inconsistent with that which viewers might actually experience, then viewing may lead to unrealistic perceptions of the world and may teach behaviors that may not be reasonably expected or appropriate (p. 375).

Cultivation theory (Gerbner et al., 1986) proposes that television viewing makes an independent contribution to the acquisition and maintenance of the perspectives and values of viewers. Despite the fact that television is only one part of a complex symbolic environment for viewers, "the generation (in some) and maintenance (in others) of some set of outlooks or beliefs can be traced to steady, cumulative exposure to the world of television" (p. 24). Cultivation effects seem to be dependent, in large part, on the degree to which television dominates viewers' sources of information (e.g., Carlson, 1983).

Through the processes of mainstreaming and resonance, television defines and refines shared conceptions of reality among otherwise diverse groups of publics. Mainstreaming refers to the steady establishment and affirmation of television world views, so that differences in perspectives and behaviors stemming from social and
cultural factors are overridden by heavy television viewing. Resonance refers to the phenomenon that occurs when heavy viewers’ everyday lives are congruent with and reinforce televised messages and the two combine to magnify cultivation effects (Gerbner et al., 1986, p. 30). Although these effects may be ameliorated by the instrumental or ritualistic uses people have for television (Carveth & Alexander, 1985) individuals' perceived reality of television content (Potter, 1980), and personal interaction (Gross & Morgan, 1985; Rothschild, 1984), cultivation theory suggests that television may be an important source of learning of values, attitudes, and behavior.

Because of the potential impact of television on perceptions of appropriate or effective behavior within family relationships, this project was designed to describe some of what people observe as they view family life on television. In particular, we analyze the use of compliance gaining behaviors between television parents and their children and television sibling characters. Compliance gaining can be defined as "the attempt of some actor-the source of communication-to effect a particular, preconceived response from some target-the receiver of the persuasive effort" (Schenck-Hamil, Wiseman, & Georgacarakos, 1982, p. 92). People use compliance gaining strategies to control their interpersonal environments and to maintain stability or bring about changes in their personal relationships (Cody, McLaughlin, & Schneider, 1981). Such behaviors are common and, as such, play an integral role in the management of interpersonal relationships. In this study, we describe the nature of compliance gaining behaviors between television family characters. Then, in order to partially assess the congruence between the compliance gaining behaviors of television characters and those of real people, our results are compared to McDermott's (1986) study of compliance gaining behaviors within real life family relationships.

Review of Related Compliance Gaining Research

Since sociologists Marwell and Schmitt (1967) compiled their typology of 16 compliance gaining strategies, researchers have investigated a broad range of topics related to interpersonal compliance gaining. For instance, researchers have examined the various situational influences on strategy selection (Cody, Jordan, & Woelfel, 1983; Cody & McLaughlin, 1980; Jackson & Backus, 1982; Miller, Boster, Roloff, & Seibold, 1977; and Willbrand & Reike, 1986), how communicator characteristics may affect strategy selection (Reardon & Boyd, 1986; Roloff & Barnicot, 1978), and how relationship dimensions are related to strategy selection (Baxter, 1983; Cody, McLaughlin, & Schneider, 1981; McDermott, 1986: Reardon & Boyd, 1986; Witteman & Fitzpatrick, 1986). Others, such as Dillard and Burgoon (1985), have focused on key dimensions underlying strategy selection.

The above line of research has produced many specific findings relevant to the use of compliance gaining strategies in family relationships. For instance, differences in persuasive strategies have been found according to age (Delia, Kline, & Burleson, 1979; de Turck & Miller, 1983) and gender (De Turck & Miller, 1983). For the purposes of the present study, the analysis of the compliance gaining behaviors used by television family characters is limited to determining the types and frequencies of strategies used by various characters and the ways in which strategies vary by family members. If people do learn appropriate compliance gaining behaviors from viewing television (the potential for which has been argued above), we might expect individuals' perceptions of the use of strategies in the "real world" and those behaviors actually observed on television to be somewhat congruent. Therefore, the compliance gaining literature is a logical place to seek information for hypotheses about the use of strategies by television characters.

Cody and McLaughlin (1980), Cody, McLaughlin, and Schneider (1981), and Cody, Woelfel, and Jordan (1983) have examined the dimensions of compliance gaining situations that may affect strategy selection. These dimensions are 1) relational intimacy, 2) possible personal benefits, 3) the long and short term consequences of the persuasive attempt, 4) the rights of the actors, 5) which party typically dominates the relational interaction, and 6) expected resistance to the persuasive attempt.

Dillard and Burgoon (1985) also suggest that people may use their situational knowledge when selecting compliance gaining messages and argue that compliance gaining strategies may be thought of as a continuum from those which are low in verbal aggression (positive, prosocial strategies) to those which are higher in verbal aggression (negative, antisocial strategies). Dillard and Burgoon's research indicates that people will use more aggressive or antisocial strategies when they perceive their persuasive attempt to be legitimate, when they perceive considerable self benefit, and when they perceive the specified outcome to be in the target's best interest. Not surprisingly, when people saw themselves as less dominant than the persuasive target, they were likely to use less aggressive, more 'prosocial strategies.
These findings suggest that parents may be more likely than children to use antisocial strategies in attempting to gain compliance. By societal convention and necessity, parents often have legitimate power over their children and may act in what they believe to be their children's best interest. Conversely, children, who usually are less dominant than their parents, probably will not employ antisocial strategies as often as their parents, unless they have much to gain through parental compliance with their request. Although Dillard and Burgoon didn't address the issue, it seems reasonable to assume that children also may become more antisocial in their choice of compliance gaining strategies when they perceive that they have nothing left to lose.

This line of research dearly recognizes power, perceived benefit, relational consequences, and intimacy as natural components of familial relationships. However, like most other compliance gaining research, most studies relevant to family relationships focus on which strategies people report they probably would use in hypothetical situations. Little attention has been given to the study of the strategies people actually do use when attempting to get others to do what they want them to do (Miller, Boster, Roloff, & Seibold, 1987). One exception to this is a recent study conducted by McDermott (1986) which examined the strategies parents actually used in natural compliance gaining situations. Parents of children between 7 and 11 years old were unobtrusively observed attempting to gain compliance from their children in public places. Parents used prosocial strategies slightly more often at the outset of a compliance gaining effort, but antisocial strategies were used with equal frequency in those episodes requiring subsequent trials. While prosocial strategies were observed to be most effective, few parents continued to use prosocial strategies throughout the compliance gaining interaction episode. Strategies that the children used with their parents or siblings were not reported.

In view of the research on compliance gaining and the potential for congruence between "real life" and fictional "television life" compliance gaining behavior, the following research questions and hypotheses were formulated:

Q1: What are the frequencies with which television parents and their children and television siblings use "real world" compliance gaining strategies?

Q2: To what extent are television family characters successful in gaining compliance? Q3: Does the use and success of strategies differ between situation comedy and drama programs?

H1: Parent characters will be more likely than child characters in parent-child dyads to use antisocial compliance gaining strategies.

H2: Child characters will be more likely than parent characters in parent-child dyads to use prosocial strategies.

H3: Parent and child characters in parent-child dyads will use more prosocial than antisocial strategies.

Method

During two consecutive weeks in the spring of 1988, a sample of 41 episodes of prime time network programs were videotaped. The programs were selected for videotaping and analysis based on the known presence of family configurations as primary to the plot of the program. Two episodes of 18 programs were obtained. Only one episode of five programs were obtained because of network program schedule changes. A total of 17 one hour program episodes and 24 half hour programs were obtained, yielding 29 hours of programming. Each program was classified by genre as either a drama or situation comedy.

Each episode was coded for compliance gaining behaviors between parent characters and their children and between siblings by one of two independent judges. The coding unit was any complete or incomplete verbalization or nonverbal expression initiated by the program characters. Coding units were classified as compliance gaining behaviors if they were implicit or explicit attempts by the characters to get others to do what they wanted them to do. Each compliance gaining behavior was coded for persuasive agent, persuasive target, strategy used, success of attempt, and number of attempts.

In order to identify the compliance gaining strategies that were used, we adapted Cody, McLaughlin, and Schneider's (1981) 16 category system by adding five categories suggested by McDermott (1986). Table I presents the adapted coding system. McDermott, as well as Delia, Kline, and Burleson (1979), argue that coding systems for compliance gaining behaviors between adults neglect some crucial categories that are characteristic of children's attempts to gain compliance from their parents and siblings. Based on conceptual similarity, four of the five
additional categories were placed within the four superordinate categories identified by Cody, McLaughlin-, and Schneider (1981): personal rejection, justification, exchange, and manipulation. The four superordinate categories were also grouped into antisocial and prosocial behaviors for later analysis. For almost all of the categories, the prosocial or antisocial "tone" of the compliance gaining attempt is suggested by the nature of the category itself. For instance, threats and love withdrawal have inherently antisocial tones about them. However, our coding system did not account for "tone" as a separate variable to be assessed for each attempt. The "command" category was left as a category of its own, since it could have been either positive or negative in tone. Thus, commands could have been either prosocial or antisocial in nature.

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The use of this code in a pretest using episodes of Kate and Allie indicated that only 17 categories were used by the characters and that only three of the categories accounted for 71% of all compliance gaining attempts (Comstock & Haefner, 1987). A review of the current sample of programs before coding indicated that it was unlikely that all of the categories of the code would be used and that, again, most of the attempts would fall into three main categories. It was unlikely that a sample of 20% of the episodes under study would contain examples of all of the behaviors in the coding system. Therefore, two judges were trained to use the compliance gaining coding system using examples of the coding categories obtained from the Kate and Allie episodes and from the original examples used by Cody, McLaughlin, & Schneider (1981). They trained until there was 100% agreement about persuasive agents, persuasive targets, number of attempts, and success of attempts. Then, the coders trained using two episodes of the programs in the current sample and obtained acceptable intercoder reliability (84%) for the 21 category strategy coding system (agreements/ (agreements + disagreements). Each coder was then assigned half of the remaining sample which they coded independently.

Results

Research Questions

Total sample. The characters in the families in the 41 episodes attempted to gain compliance from one another a total of 341 times. The average number of compliance gaining behaviors per hour of programming was 11.72, although dramas averaged only 5.24 attempts per hour and the situation comedies averaged 20.91 attempts per hour. There was no significant difference between the number of successful (54%) and unsuccessful (46%) attempts for all characters ($X^2 = 2.64 \ [1], P < .15$). Of those attempts that were successful, 81% gained the behavior sought on the first try and another 14% only had to make two attempts in order to gain compliance. In only 5% of the incidents which were finally successful did the characters have to seek compliance more than twice. This pattern was identical for programs in both genres.

Overall, 19 different compliance gaining strategies were employed by the characters. The two strategies that were not used were extended expertise and love withdrawal. The most common strategies were command (31.8%), reason (19.7%), and simple statements (16.7%). Hinting was the next most frequently used strategy (10%), but all other strategies were used 12 or

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the use of a command was more likely to be successful than unsuccessful, reasons were more likely to be unsuccessful than successful, and simple statements were equally as likely to be successful as unsuccessful ($X^2 = 27.6 \ [2], P < .001$). All other strategies were about equally likely to be successful as unsuccessful.

Parent to child compliance gaining behaviors. Parental attempts to gain their children’s compliance accounted for 45.3% of all coded behaviors. Parents were successful in their attempts 63.6% of the time and were significantly more likely to be successful than unsuccessful ($X2 = 6.94 \ [1], P < .01$). Fathers were observed to make more attempts than mothers, but there was no difference between mothers and fathers in the success of attempts. Over two-thirds of all parental attempts were comprised of commands (39%), reasons (17.5%), and simple statements (14.3%). Chi-square analyses using only the command, reason, and simple statement categories indicated that parental commands were more likely to be successful than unsuccessful and that parental reasons
were more likely to be unsuccessful than successful ($X^2 = 12.26 \ [2], p < .01$). No differences were found between mothers and fathers in their successes with the different strategies.

**Child to parent compliance gaining behaviors.** The children's attempts to gain their parents' compliance accounted for 30.9% of coded behaviors. Children were significantly more likely to be unsuccessful in these attempts than successful ($X^2 = 6.94, P < .01$). The children used 14 different strategies, although reasons (25.7%), commands (19.0%), and simple statements (17.1%) were the most frequently used. These three categories comprised 61.8% of all of children's attempts to gain their parents' compliance. Chi-square analyses using the command, reason, and simple statement categories indicated that these three strategies were equally likely to be successful as unsuccessful. The use of strategies and success or failure of strategies did not differ because of the sex of the parent. The sex of the child in parent-child interactions was not coded.

**Sibling compliance gaining behaviors.** Siblings' attempts to gain each others' compliance accounted for 23.8% of all coded behaviors. Siblings used 14 different strategies but, similar to parents and child to parent attempts, the most common strategies were commands (33.3%), simple statements (21.0%), and reasons (17.3%). They tended to be more successful than unsuccessful in their attempts with siblings ($X^2 = 2.77 \ [1], P < .08$), but all strategies were equally likely to be successful as unsuccessful. Brothers and sisters were equally likely to be successful in gaining the compliance of their siblings. Further, brothers were no more likely than sisters to comply with the persuasive attempt of their sibling. There were no differences in strategies based on whether the siblings were older or younger.

**Compliance gaining behaviors by genre.** Compliance gaining behaviors were much more likely to be observed in situation comedies than in dramas ($X^2 = 77.18 \ [1], P < .001$). However, the characters in situation comedies were not more likely than characters in dramas to be successful in their attempts. Likewise, none of the strategies were more likely to be used by characters in situation comedies than in dramas.

**Hypotheses**

**Hypothesis 1.** A chi-square analysis indicated that the hypothesis that parent characters would be more likely than child characters in parent-child dyads to use antisocial strategies was not supported ($X^2 = .16 \ [1], p < .70$). Parent and child characters were equally likely to use antisocial strategies when they were used.

**Hypothesis 2.** A chi-square analysis indicated that the hypothesis that child characters would be more likely than parent characters in parent-child dyads to use prosocial strategies was not supported ($X^2 = .20 \ [1], P < .60$). Parents and children were equally likely to use prosocial strategies.

**Hypothesis 3.** Chi-square analyses indicated that the hypothesis that both child characters ($X^2 = 9.9 \ [1], P < .01$) and parent characters ($X^2 = 10.32 \ [1], P < .01$) would use more prosocial than antisocial strategies was supported.

**Comparison With Naturalistic Compliance Gaining Situation**

Several differences emerge from a comparison of the results of our television parent to child compliance gaining behaviors and those of McDermott's (1986) observations of parents and children in public settings. McDermott found that 86.8% of parents used more than one attempt to gain the compliance of their children, but only 15% of television parents tried more than once. Because most television parents used only one attempt, we compare our results only to the strategies McDermott found real life parents to use on their first attempts. The most common strategy for real parents on first attempts at gaining compliance was command (19%). Command was also most common for television parents, but accounted for a far greater proportion of all of their first attempts (47.8%). Comparisons of McDermott's other most frequently occurring categories yield few similarities with our results. Of first attempts by real life parents, proper name saying, promises, and physical punishment accounted for 19%, 7.5%, and 4%, respectively. Each of these accounted for less than 1% of first attempts by television parents. General nonverbal accounted for 11% of real parents' first attempts, but only 2% of television parents' attempts. Threats
were used by real parents on 8.7% of first attempts and 5% of first attempts by television parents. Similar to our results, McDermott found no differences between mothers and fathers in strategies used.

Discussion

The results of this investigation suggest that, while viewers may see a wide array of compliance gaining strategies employed by television characters over the span of several programs, the usual ways for characters to gain compliance are quite limited. While success in gaining compliance among characters is not the rule, conflict over compliance is rare. Perhaps the program scripts do not allow for redundant interaction in order to "keep the action going" toward resolution within the time frame of the episode. Parents are portrayed as most often being successful in gaining their children's compliance, while child characters are much more likely to fail in their attempts with their parents. Parent-child compliance gaining interactions were observed much more frequently than sibling interactions, suggesting that television portrays family life as mainly revolving around parent-child relationships.

These results also suggest that compliance gaining behaviors are less likely to be observed on dramas than on situation comedies. When they do occur in dramas, however, they follow patterns of strategy use and success that are consistent with portrayals in situation comedies. Gerbner et al. (1986) insist that the mass produced, commercially regulated messages and images that are projected through television form a repetitive pattern across all types of television programs. These results indicate that despite differences in frequencies of occurrences of compliance gaining behaviors among television family members, the messages about the appropriateness of certain strategies and their success are consistent.

When these results are compared to McDermott's (1986) naturalistic observations of parents attempting to gain the compliance of their children, there is a lack of congruence between television parents and real life parents. Although both were observed to use commands most frequently on first attempts, television parents used commands much more often than real life parents and the next most common strategies observed by McDermott (proper name saying, general nonverbal, threats, promises) were not used with any frequency by television parents. Furthermore, the ease with which television parents either gain compliance or give up trying was not characteristic of actual parenting patterns that McDermott observed.

These dissimilarities may be explained, in part, by other differences between the naturalistic observations and those we have made of a limited segment of television life. First, McDermott observed parenting behaviors in public places. Yet most of the compliance gaining interactions between television parents and children occur in a home or other private setting (especially in the situation comedies). Compliance gaining strategy choices, their success, and the persistence with which compliance is pursued may depend, in part, on the privacy of the situation.

Perhaps more importantly, we do not know anything about the real life television viewing behaviors of the adults and children in McDermott's study. Research from cultivation perspectives suggest that the socializing effects of television may depend upon the hours individuals spend viewing television, their motivations for viewing, their perceptions of program reality, and interpersonal influence, to name a few important variables. Investigations of the effects of viewing televised compliance gaining behaviors must account for a host of intervening variables that may lead to individual differences.

The dissimilarities between our television sample and the naturalistic investigation may also be attributed to the entertainment purposes of television content. Compliance gaining behaviors are woven into the scripts of programs in order to be sources of humor or conflict. For instance, a subplot of an episode of "The Cosby Show" revolved around the teenaged son's attempts to persuade his parents to let him have his own apartment. His different compliance gaining strategies were purposely written to evoke laughter and tension in the audience. Of course, in real life situations, no such "script" is provided nor is there necessarily an entertainment-of-audience motive behind compliance gaining attempts. Clearly, a limitation of this study is that we did not adequately assess the complexity of the compliance gaining situations in the programs. The hypotheses were formed based on compliance gaining research that suggests that situational knowledge affects strategy selection. Future investigations should clarify the contexts within which compliance gaining behaviors among television characters are "written up" and determine the extent to which those contexts match real life compliance gaining contexts.
The lack of congruity between real life and television life is not surprising, given the dissimilarities that have been found between the two in other areas, such as the portrayals of the elderly (Greenberg, Korzenny, & Atkin, 1980), minorities (Greenberg, 1988), women (Matelski, 1985), and violence (Gerbner et al, 1986). Yet, behavioral similarity may also be a spurious expectation. Cultivation theory and social learning theory suggest that even though, modeling of television behaviors may not be observed, viewers, attitudes about socially appropriate compliance gaining behavior may be modified and their repertoires of strategies may be increased through the viewing of consistent patterns of those behaviors. Future research that tries to link people’s actual compliance gaining behaviors should not only observe behavior, but should also assess people’s expectations about their own and others’ appropriate behaviors.

In conclusion, prime time family television programs present a somewhat limited, but consistent view of compliance gaining among family members. The potential for cultivation of expectations about appropriate behaviors exists because of this consistency. Clearly, the interpersonal relationships among television family characters may be more complex than we have been able to describe in this study. Further research should employ a variety of research methods, such as observation, ethnography, self reports and detailed analyses of latent content to investigate the learning that may occur as the television world and "real life" meet.
REFERENCES


