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ABSTRACT

Recognizing that interest is essential to motivation, this study was designed both to identify and describe the content interest patterns and media preferences (print and television) of middle-grade children and to determine any relationship between these interests and sex, race, or socioeconomic status (SES). An inventory was administered to 250 boys and 282 girls in regular fourth and fifth grades of Hackensack, New Jersey, public schools. Each item was read aloud as students followed and responded first to a four point (3-2-1-0) like-dislike scale and then to media choices. Interest clusters were categorized under fantasy-comedy, informational, social empathy, recreational, excitement-fantastic, excitement-realistic, and artistic. Results showed that (1) social class, not race, affects children's content interests; (2) lower SES children, especially girls, prefer fantasy significantly more than do middle or higher SES children; (3) girls like to read more than do boys; (4) lower SES children like to watch television more than do middle or higher SES children; and (5) all children prefer watching to reading. (References and tables of findings are included.) (JM)

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CHILDREN'S CONTENT INTERESTS -- A FACTOR ANALYTIC STUDY

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From the time of Rousseau's Emile in the eighteenth century, through the work of Dewey (1) and Thorndike (11) in the early part of this century, up to the recent taxonomy developed by Krathwohl, Bloom and Masia (5), interests have held a prominent place in educational theory. They are an intrinsic part of the motivational system in man. Krathwohl says, "...motivation is critical to learning and thus is one of the major ways in which the affective domain is used as a means to the cognitive...." (5, p. 57).

This study sought to identify and describe the content interest patterns and media preferences (print and television) of today's middle-grade children and to see if these patterns and preferences may be related to sex, race, or socio-economic status (SES)

Over the years, reading researchers, always anxious to offer children reading content that would appeal, have given children's interests considerable attention. Kujoth (6) has compiled fifty-five articles on the subject; Zimet (14) notes that over 300 studies of interests and story preferences have been reported. Children's television preferences have been surveyed less. Aside from the early benchmark studies of Himmelweit (3) and Schramm (9), only Witty (13) has consistently reported favorites for ages and stages. Lyle and Hoffman's (7) recent report for the Surgeon General brings this literature about children's uses of television up to date.

These researchers usually tried to group responses by setting up a priori categories based on types of literature or content. Many times they assessed

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only the content available to their examples. Variables such as books in the home, school and local libraries, and classroom experiences may restrict answers about reading materials; likewise, network offerings, family size, number of sets, and the quantity and quality of local reception are factors which may limit choices about viewing favorites.

There appeared to be a need for a new and different way of looking at the content interests of today's electronic-age children. The design of this study sought to provide for the problem of availability (as first identified by Thorndike, 12) by using an inventory of fictitious, annotated titles and to provide for the problem of a valid category system by developing categories via factor analyses of the S's inventory responses.

The literature review also raised a question about relationships between children's reading and viewing interests. Himmelweit (3) has hypothesized that children have a broad, underlying pattern of interests that extend through all media; Schramm (9) has concluded that children go to television to satisfy fantasy and entertainment needs and to print to satisfy informational needs. To try to answer this question, this study had Ss first indicate degree-of-interest and then indicate whether they would read, watch, both read and watch, or do nothing about each inventory title.

Method

The inventory (2) was developed with attention to the work of Thorndike (11), and Schulte (10). Figure 1 shows format and sample items. From a pool of 130 items, the final fifty were selected on the criterion that they could be possible both in print and on TV. These were submitted to a panel of judges to check content validity. Feasibility of format and probable internal reliability of emerging clusters were established by a pilot test on 196 Ss with subsequent

Figure 1. Sample Inventory Items

1. Let's Experiment with Rockets and Jets

Discover how rockets and jets work, how man travels in space.

(a)	Yes	Maybe Yes	Probably Not	No
(b)	Read	Watch	Do Nothing	

2. Dating Days

Chuck gets jealous when he sees girl friend Sally out with his best friend Hank and decides to get even.

(a)	Yes	Maybe Yes	Probably Not	No
(b)	Read	Watch	Do Nothing	

3. Do Your Own Thing

About coin collecting, stamp collecting, model assembly and other hobbies.

(a)	Yes	Maybe Yes	Probably Not	No
(b)	Read	Watch	Do Nothing	

4. All About Man

The Human body, its bones, muscles, and main organs. How man lives and grows.

(a)	Yes	Maybe Yes	Probably Not	No
(b)	Read	Watch	Do Nothing	

5. Adventures of Mike and Midge

From getting caught in an avalanche in Switzerland and an earthquake in Hawaii to being captured by a pygmy tribe in Australia, ten-year-old twins Mike and Midge lead a life full of adventure.

(a)	Yes	Maybe Yes	Probably Not	No
(b)	Read	Watch	Do Nothing	

trial factor analyses of the responses.

The inventory was administered to the research sample, 250 boys and 282 girls in regular fourth and fifth grades in the Hackensack, N.J., public schools. Each item was read by the investigator as S s followed and responded first to a four point (3-2-1-0) like-dislike scale and then to media choices.

Interest scores and media preference scores (separate Read and Watch scores) were computed for each S for each cluster to emerge from the factor analyses. SES data (occupation and education levels of S's main support), required by the Index of Socioeconomic Status (4), were obtained from school records.

The data were analyzed in two steps. First, to group the fifty variables (inventory items) into valid clusters the degree-of-interest responses of the boys and girls were separately subjected to principal components factor analyses with varimax rotations. Separate analyses by sex were performed because most previous research indicated sex accounted for the major differences in interests for this age group.

The factors that emerged were then named according to the kind of items that loaded (correlated) at least .30 with them. A further check of significance was the reliability coefficient of each factor or cluster. Based on the domain sampling model described by Nunnally (8), this coefficient, hereinafter referred to a r_{tt}, is the correlation of scores of a collection of items with true scores, determined from the intercorrelations of the items. Only those clusters with an r_{tt} of at least .70 were considered representative of a valid interest area and used for further analyses. To determine the over-all popularity of the interest clusters, those that emerged were rank-ordered by mean scores.

Secondly, since the sample contained sub-groups with adequate N s, differences in cluster scores related to race (black and non-black) and SES were tested for significance by analyses of variance procedures. Also, rank-ordered patterns of the sub-groups were inspected to see if statistical differences would prove substantive.

Results and Conclusions

For the boys, eight significant factors, accounting for approximately 45 per cent of the total variance, emerged. Table 1 shows the item loadings and reliability coefficients for the boys' clusters. Fantasy-Comedy contained folk, fable, fairy, modern fantasy and comedy of a cartoon-like quality. Social studies, science, and factual biography made up the Informational cluster. The biographical item, "Sports Heroes," clustered with the other two sports items while items about people and everyday problems made up the Social Empathy cluster. Items about the electronic media broke out into a separate cluster named Recreational. The "excitement" items emerged as two clusters: science fiction and spy-mystery-crime made up Excitement-Fantastic and historical fiction themes dominated Excitement-Realistic. Items about music, ballet, cooking, and art made up the Artistic cluster.

Table 1. - Item Loadings and Reliability Coefficients for the Boys' Eight Clusters

Fantasy-Comedy r_{tt}=.92		Informational r_{tt}=.83	
Dewey Duck	.71	Many Faces of Science	.66
Go, Go, the Ghost	.70	Rockets and Jets	.58
Marty, the Martian	.70	Unusual Animals	.57
Merry Magpies	.68	Alaskan Eskimos	.54
Tom Turtle	.65	All About Man	.48
Petrina, Good Witch	.59	American Revolution	.47
Princess and Elf	.59	John & Jacqueline Kennedy	.44
Georgia Pete	.57	News in a Nutshell	.36
King Stona	.51	We Live in the Sea	.36
Magic Toyshop	.50		
Homer Adams	.48		
Rockheads	.31		

Sports r_{tt}=.89		Social Empathy r_{tt}=.83		Recreational r_{tt}=.76	
All About Sports	.85	Jr. High 44	.60	TV and Movies	.75
Sports Heroes	.79	American Youth	.56	TV Previews	.73
Sports Events	.76	First Day for Davy	.54	Discs of the Week	.49
		Dating Days	.53		
		First Dance	.52		
		A Friend at Last	.39		

Excitement-Fantastic r_{tt}=.79		Artistic r_{tt}=.75		Excitement-Realistic r_{tt}=.79	
Green Glob	.58	Music for Young People	.57	Distant Drums	.64
Adv. of Mike & Midge	.57	Ballet	.55	Wild West	.53
Witness	.42	How to Cook	.54	Daniel Boone	.48
Perilous Mission	.37	Fun with Art	.45	Faithful Roger	.38
Bernardo Ray	.36	Foods	.38		
Interplanetary Patrol	.32				

For the girls, nine significant factors, accounting for approximately 50 per cent of the total variance, emerged. Table 2 shows the item loadings and r_{tt} levels for each cluster. Folk, fairy, modern fantasy, and a science fiction item made up the Fantasy group. The five Science items clustered together as did the three items about Sports. Social Empathy-Fun and Excitement was a cluster of seven highly exciting or funny items that share a strong social empathetic theme--the element that seems to represent their commonality. The three historical fiction items clustered with three items that share an element of excitement mixed with realism, hence the title Excitement-Realistic. The three electronic media items clustered with items about cooking, foods, and ballet in the grouping named Recreational. Girls who were interested in hobbies in general ("Do Your Own Thing") were also interested in pets, art, and serious music, according to the cluster called Hobbies-Artistic. History, news, and factual biography items made up the Social Studies group. Five items, clearly related by their social empathetic themes dealing with people and everyday problems (dating, growing up, life adjustment), formed the cluster named Social Empathy-People and Problems.

Table 2. -- Item Loadings and Reliability Coefficients for the Girls' Nine Clusters

Fantasy r_{tt}=.92		Science r_{tt}=.86		Sports r_{tt}=.90	
Princess & Elf	.72	We Live in the Sea	.70	Sports Events	.83
Tom Turtle	.71	Many Faces of Science	.66	All About Sports	.80
Dewey Duck	.68	Unusual Animals	.63	Sports Heroes	.77
Go, Go, the Ghost	.66	All About Man	.55		
Magic Toyshop	.61	Rockets & Jets	.44		
Marty, the Martian	.57				
King Stona	.55				
Interplanetary Pat.	.41				

Social Empathy-Fun and Excitement r_{tt}=.86		Excitement-Realistic r_{tt}=.80		Recreational r_{tt}=.80	
Faithful Roger	.54	Daniel Boone	.67	TV Previews	.75
Homer Adams	.53	Distant Drums	.67	Discs of Week	.61
Rockheads	.53	Wild West	.55	TV & Movies	.57
Witness	.51	Alaskan Eskimos	.54	How to Cook Foods	.41
Green Glob	.48	Adv. of Mike & Midge	.50	Ballet	.39
Petrina, Good Witch	.40				
Perilous Mission	.33				

Hobbies-Artistic r_{tt}=.73		Social Studies r_{tt}=.78		Social Empathy-People & Problems r_{tt}=.80	
Do Your Own Thing	.66	American Revolution	.67	First Dance	.61
Pet Care	.50	News in a Nutshell	.62	Dating Days	.59
Fun with Art	.38	John & Jacqueline Kennedy	.54	American Youth	.49
Music for Young People	.36			Jr. High 44	.45
				First Day for Davy	.44

Table 3 shows the rank-order listings of the boys' and girls' clusters. Boys' high-scoring clusters were: Sports, Excitement-Fantastic, Recreational, Excitement-Realistic, and Informational. Their low-scoring categories were: Fantasy-Comedy, Social Empathy, and Artistic.

Girls' favorites were: Social Empathy-Fun and Excitement, Fantasy, Social Empathy-People and Problems, Recreational, and Hobbies-Artistic. While Excitement-Realistic ranked sixth, Social Studies, Science, and Sports were clearly the least favored.

It may be concluded that sex continues to be a major determiner of middle-grade children's content interests.

Table 3. - Average Interest Cluster Scores and Clusters in Rank Order

Boys N=250			Girls N=282		
Rank	Cluster	Average of Item Means	Rank	Cluster	Average of Item Means
1.	Sports	2.8	1.	Social Empathy-Fun and Excitement	2.4
2.	Excitement-Fantastic	2.4	2.	Fantasy	2.3
3.	Recreational	2.3	3.	Social Empathy-People and Problems	2.3
4.	Excitement-Realistic	2.2	4.	Recreational	2.2
5.	Informational	2.1	5.	Hobbies-Artistic	2.1
6.	Fantasy-Comedy	1.8	6.	Excitement-Realistic	1.9
7.	Social Empathy	1.8	7.	Social Studies	1.7
8.	Artistic	1.4	8.	Science	1.6
			9.	Sports	1.4

Table 4 shows the boys' and girls' Read and Watch cluster scores in rank order. Except for Informational, the boys' patterns match. The upper five clusters for the girls are quite similar. Hobbies-Arts and Social Studies ranked higher on the Read side than on the Watch side. However, cluster for cluster, the Watch scores were always consistently higher than Read Scores.

Table 4. - Boys' and Girls' Read and Watch Preferences In Rank Order

	Read			Watch	
	Cluster	Average of Item Means		Cluster	Average of Item Means
		Boys (N=250)			
1.	Sports	.64	1.	Sports	.87
2.	Informational	.43	2.	Excitement-Fantastic	.79
3.	Excitement-Fantastic	.42	3.	Excitement-Realistic	.68
4.	Excitement-Realistic	.38	4.	Recreational	.68
5.	Recreational	.33	5.	Informational	.66
6.	Fantasy-Comedy	.30	6.	Fantasy-Comedy	.58
7.	Social Empathy	.25	7.	Social Empathy	.46
8.	Artistic	.25	8.	Artistic	.40
		Girls (N=282)			
1.	Social Empathy - People, Problems	.51	1.	Social Empathy - Fun, Excitement	.74
2.	Hobbies-Arts	.51	2.	Fantasy	.71
3.	Social Empathy - Fun, Excitement	.50	3.	Recreational	.70
4.	Fantasy	.50	4.	Social Empathy - People, Problems	.61
			5.	Hobbies-Arts	.57
5.	Recreational	.45	6.	Excitement-Realistic	.57
6.	Excitement-Realistic	.40	7.	Science	.49
7.	Social Studies	.39	8.	Sports	.46
8.	Science	.31	9.	Social Studies	.45
9.	Sports	.28			

Although the data would generally seem to confirm the Himmelweit hypothesis that children have an underlying pattern of interests that run through both media,

Schramm's theory that children look to print to satisfy informational needs and to television to satisfy fantasy and entertainment needs seems partially supported in that within the Read preference patterns some informational clusters (Hobbies-Arts, Social Studies for girls and Informational for boys) ranked higher than they did in the Watch preference patterns.

The results of numerous two-way analyses of variance (race x SES) of the boys' and girls' interest and media preference cluster scores revealed some statistical differences that did not prove substantive since the media preference patterns (rank-order listings) of the various sub-groups were very similar. One exception was the statistically higher scores registered by lower-SES S's for the fantasy clusters. Fantasy generally also ranked higher for low-SES groups (Tables 5 and 6). Interest in fantasy appears to be inversely related to socioeconomic status.

Table 5

BOYS' READ AND WATCH PREFERENCES IN RANK ORDER: SES I, SES II, SES III

SES I (Low) N=91			SES II (Middle) N=121			SES III (High) N=38		
Rank	Cluster	Average of Item Means	Rank	Cluster	Average of Item Means	Rank	Cluster	Average of Item Means
				Read Preferences				
1.	Sports	.64	1.	Sports	.63	1.	Sports	.63
2.	Excitement-Fantastic	.45	2.	Informational	.42	2.	Excitement-Fantastic	.46
3.	Informational	.43	3.	Excitement-Realistic	.38	3.	Informational	.44
4.	Excitement-Realistic	.38	4.	Excitement-Fantastic	.38	4.	Excitement-Realistic	.36
5.	Fantasy-Comedy	.35	5.	Recreational	.34	5.	Recreational	.30
6.	Recreational	.32	6.	Fantasy-Comedy	.30	6.	Artistic	.27
7.	Social Empathy	.31	7.	Social Empathy	.23	7.	Fantasy-Comedy	.24
8.	Artistic	.29	8.	Artistic	.21	8.	Social Empathy	.16
				Watch Preferences				
1.	Sports	.88	1.	Sports	.88	1.	Sports	.86
2.	Excitement-Fantastic	.79	2.	Excitement-Fantastic	.81	2.	Excitement-Fantastic	.76
3.	Recreational	.74	3.	Excitement-Realistic	.70	3.	Recreational	.72
4.	Excitement-Realistic	.71	4.	Recreational	.70	4.	Informational	.71
5.	Fantasy-Comedy	.64	5.	Informational	.63	5.	Excitement-Realistic	.54
6.	Informational	.63	6.	Fantasy-Comedy	.56	6.	Fantasy-Comedy	.46
7.	Social Empathy	.54	7.	Social Empathy	.44	7.	Artistic	.43
8.	Artistic	.43	8.	Artistic	.37	8.	Social Empathy	.37

Table 6

GIRLS' READ AND WATCH PREFERENCES IN RANK ORDER: SES I, SES II, SES III

SES I (Low) N=89		SES II (Middle) N=143		SES III (High) N=48	
Rank Cluster	Average of Item Means	Rank Cluster	Average of Item Means	Rank Cluster	Average of Item Means
Read Preferences					
1. Fantasy	.53	1. Social Empathy-People, Problems	.52	1. Social Empathy-Fun, Excitement	.54
2. Social Empathy-People, Problems	.51	2. Hobbies-Arts	.51	2. Social Empathy-People, Problems	.50
3. Hobbies-Arts	.49	3. Social Empathy-Fun, Excitement	.51	3. Hobbies-Arts	.49
4. Social Empathy-Fun, Excitement	.46	4. Fantasy	.49	4. Excitement-Realistic	.47
5. Recreational	.45	5. Recreational	.48	5. Social Studies	.39
6. Excitement-Realistic	.39	6. Excitement-Realistic	.44	6. Recreational	.38
7. Social Studies	.36	7. Social Studies	.41	7. Fantasy	.38
8. Science	.31	8. Science	.33	8. Sports	.30
9. Sports	.28	9. Sports	.27	9. Science	.27
Watch Preferences					
1. Fantasy	.78	1. Social Empathy-Fun, Excitement	.75	1. Social Empathy-Fun, Excitement	.67
2. Social Empathy-Fun, Excitement	.75	2. Recreational	.71	2. Recreational	.59
3. Recreational	.75	3. Fantasy	.70	3. Fantasy	.59
4. Social Empathy-People, Problems	.73	4. Social Empathy-People, Problems	.65	4. Social Empathy-People, Problems	.58
5. Hobbies-Arts	.60	5. Excitement-Realistic	.63	5. Excitement-Realistic	.52
6. Excitement-Realistic	.57	6. Hobbies-Arts	.57	6. Hobbies-Arts	.51
7. Science	.49	7. Science	.51	7. Science	.50
8. Sports	.48	8. Social Studies	.49	8. Sports	.42
9. Social Studies	.44	9. Sports	.46	9. Social Studies	.37

It may be concluded that while race is not an important factor affecting children's content interests, social class does appear to influence children's interest in fantasy. Lower-SES children, especially girls, prefer fantasy significantly more than do middle- or higher-SES children.

Across-clusters, three-way analyses of variance of the boys' and girls' Read and Watch scores (Sex x Race x SES) revealed that girls had a Read score that was significantly higher than that of the boys; SES I non-blacks had a Watch score that was significantly higher than those of the other two SES levels. Consistent with previous research, it may be concluded that girls like to read more than do boys and lower-SES children like to watch television more than do middle- or higher-SES children.

Analyses of variance, repeated measures design, of the Read and Watch preference scores of all the boys and girls for their respective clusters revealed higher Watch than Read scores for every content cluster. All children preferred to Watch rather than Read content of all kinds.

Implications

Generally, it would seem that the culturally related variables of sex and social class continue to be affective in shaping children's interests. These middle-grade children of the 1970's continue to reflect the traditional "boy" and "girl" patterns. They seem not yet to have been affected by the unisex, women's lib movement of the times. The lower-SES children, like generations before them, continue to express their hope to escape from the grim realities of lower-class living through a significantly greater interest in fantasy.

This study has implications for educators, publishers, TV producers, and

nment.

For Educators

It would seem that classroom teachers of middle-grade children should provide an abundance of reading material--newspapers, magazines, books, paperbacks, TV listings--that will satisfy the interests of both boys and girls. Strict adherence to a story by story treatment of a basal reader series violates the tenet that learning should be based upon interests. Certainly, consideration of the sex differences alone, should suggest to teachers that they allow children options in selecting content to read.

Teachers concerned with the education of black children may have no need to provide special types of content since the interest patterns of blacks closely resemble those of the general population. Certainly, the inclusion of materials with black identity figures would be recommended, for although this particular facet was not directly investigated in this study, black girls had significantly higher scores on the Social Empathy-People and Problems cluster which contained such items.

Teachers concerned with the education of low-socioeconomic middle-grade children should be aware that these children have a significant interest in cartoon-type fantasy. Perhaps certain comic books, magazines, paperbacks, and books which feature old and new folk heroes, talking animals, and other modern fantasy themes might be included in the reading fare offered to the more reluctant readers in economically deprived areas.

Teachers need to offer a wide literature program so that all children can be exposed to all genres and thus broaden present culturally conditioned patterns of interest.

Teachers should also be aware of middle-graders' consistent preference to Watch rather than to Read content of all types. This should suggest a greater use of visuals--filmstrips, films, pictures, television--in all curriculum areas.

For Publishers

Generally, book publishers do a good job of providing a wide variety of materials to meet the needs of middle-graders. However, this study points to a growing interest, shared by both boys and girls, in content dealing with their recreational use of the electronic media (television, movies, records).

Publishers of educational materials should also be aware of middle-grade boys' and girls' greater preference for watching than for reading. Many texts and trade books can be supplemented with visual materials or duplicated in visual forms.

For TV Producers

Commercial TV has offered a steady diet of fantasy and social empathy to children of all ages. It would seem that boys especially would welcome more informational programs based on science and social studies content. Girls, too, indicate a willingness to watch content related to their hobby and recreational interests, such as cooking, music, art, records, and ballet.

For Government

Government, through its principal regulating agency, the Federal Communications Commission, must recognize the inportance of commercial television in the lives of our children and demand that the networks provide at least a minimum number of hours per week of stimulating programming of content appropriate for children of varying age groups as a condition for maintaining the franchise.

This is a "watching" generation; no longer can commercial interests alone decide what will be available to viewers. The airwaves are a public trust and deserve closer regulation and attention.

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