

# **HHS Public Access**

Author manuscript *Clin Pediatr (Phila)*. Author manuscript; available in PMC 2016 August 01.

Published in final edited form as:

Clin Pediatr (Phila). 2015 August ; 54(9): 862-870. doi:10.1177/0009922815574074.

# Maternal beliefs and parenting practices regarding their preschool child's TV viewing: An exploration in a sample of low-income Mexican-origin mothers

Darcy A. Thompson, MD, MPH<sup>1</sup>, Sarah Polk, MD, ScM<sup>2</sup>, Charissa S.L. Cheah, PhD<sup>3</sup>, Elizabeth A. Vandewater, PhD<sup>4</sup>, Susan L. Johnson, PhD<sup>1</sup>, Marilyn Camacho Chrismer, MS<sup>2</sup>, and Jeanne M. Tschann, PhD<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Pediatrics, University of Colorado School of Medicine

<sup>2</sup>Department of Pediatrics, Johns Hopkins School of Medicine

<sup>3</sup>Department of Psychology, University of Maryland Baltimore County

<sup>4</sup>Division of Health Promotion and Behavioral Sciences, Michael & Susan Dell Center for Healthy Living, University of Texas School of Public Health-Austin Regional Campus

<sup>5</sup>Department of Psychiatry, University of California at San Francisco

# Abstract

**Objective**—To explore maternal beliefs about TV viewing and related parenting practices in low-income Mexican-origin mothers of preschoolers.

**Methods**—Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 21 low-income Mexican-origin mothers of preschoolers. Interviews were audio recorded and analyzed using a theoretically based thematic analytic approach.

**Results**—Mothers described strong beliefs about the positive and negative impact of television content. Mothers emphasized the educational value of specific programming. Content restrictions were common. Time restrictions were not clearly defined; however, many mothers preferred short versus long episodes of viewing. Mothers spoke positively about family viewing and the role of TV viewing in enabling mothers to accomplish household tasks.

**Discussion**—These findings have implications for intervening in this population. Interventionists should consider the value mothers place on the educational role of TV viewing, the direct benefit to mothers of viewing time, the lack of clear time limits, and the common practice of family co-viewing.

# Keywords

television viewing; preschool; parenting practices regarding television viewing; Latino; obesity; beliefs about TV viewing

Corresponding author: Darcy A. Thompson MD, MPH Department of Pediatrics, University of Colorado School of Medicine Anschutz Medical Campus - Mail Stop F561 12631 East 17th Avenue Aurora, CO 80045 USA darcy.thompson@ucdenver.edu Phone: 303 724 7471.

# Introduction

Research demonstrates that there are both positive and negative outcomes associated with television use. <sup>1–3</sup> TV viewing can be entertaining and children can benefit from programming that is educational or that models prosocial behavior. <sup>4</sup> Excessive TV viewing, however, is associated with poor outcomes, such as childhood obesity and low school performance, <sup>5,6</sup> and viewing of certain types of content (e.g. violence) is associated with aggressive behavior. <sup>7</sup> Negative outcomes have led government and non-profit organizations to make recommendations regarding children's TV use. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) calls for pediatricians to counsel families on viewing amounts, recommending less than 2 hours a day. Pediatricians are also advised to counsel families on the type of content viewed and the context for viewing, for example not in the child's bedroom. <sup>8</sup> Healthy People 2020 calls for an increase in the number of children nationally who are following the AAP time limits. <sup>9</sup> We are far from achieving these objectives, given that in a national sample of preschool children, 44% watched more than the AAP recommendation and 43% had TVs in their bedroom.<sup>10</sup>

Latino children are at particular risk for excessive viewing and having a TV in their bedroom. <sup>11,12</sup> A large national study found that Latino youth aged 8–18 watch about 1 additional hour of TV daily compared to white children. <sup>12</sup> Latino children were also more likely to have a TV in their bedroom (77% of Latino children vs. 64% of white children). <sup>12</sup> Given that the sociocultural context of Latino families may be unique, and that there is growing evidence supporting the need for culturally tailored interventions, research specifically focused on the viewing habits of Latino children is warranted.<sup>13–15</sup>

In order to address TV viewing habits, we must understand the factors that influence child TV viewing. Known correlates of viewing behaviors include parental income, education, and viewing habits.<sup>16</sup> However, family level factors, such as the role parents play in socializing their children regarding TV viewing, have received limited attention. Parental behavior is potentially modifiable and with a clear understanding of the role parents play, interventionists will be able to design targeted interventions addressing parental behaviors that influence child television viewing.

There is also a need to understand the precursors of parenting practices specific to child TV viewing, such as parental beliefs and values. <sup>17</sup> Health behavior theories, such as the Theory of Reasoned Action, emphasize that one's beliefs about a specific behavior can be precursors to a behavior. <sup>18</sup> Thus, parental beliefs about TV viewing may lead to specific parenting practices in this domain. In general, studies support this link between parental beliefs about TV viewing and parenting practices regarding TV viewing. <sup>19–21</sup> However, one study found that the relationship between parental beliefs about TV viewing and the practice of content restriction was mediated by child imitation of TV content. <sup>22</sup> This finding supports the need to further our understanding of parental beliefs about TV viewing and their relationship with parenting practices. In particular, we need to increase our understanding of low-income Latino families, because little is known about parental beliefs regarding TV viewing in this specific population. One study that focused on this population reported that many Latino parents believed that TV content could teach children bad habits or lead to aggressive

Thompson et al.

behavior. TV viewing was also valued for its educational role. <sup>23</sup> Another study reported that Latino parents of overweight/obese school-aged children commonly believed that TV viewing was entertaining and useful as a babysitter. <sup>24</sup> Further work in this area is needed in order to obtain a more in-depth understanding of parental beliefs about TV viewing in this population.

Because of the paucity of research on beliefs and parenting practices regarding TV viewing in low-income Latino parents, this study employed qualitative methods with the objective of exploring maternal beliefs about TV viewing and related parenting practices in a sample of low-income Mexican-origin mothers of preschoolers. The majority of Latinos in the US are Mexican American (63%).<sup>25</sup> This study focuses on parents of preschoolers because the preschool age period is a time when parenting practices regarding TV viewing and child viewing habits are becoming established. <sup>26</sup> Additionally, the majority of studies on parenting practices regarding TV viewing in our understanding of parenting in this domain for preschool children. Gaining an in-depth understanding of parental beliefs and practices regarding child TV viewing in a low-income Mexican-origin sample of parents of preschoolers holds the potential to inform interventionists about the family context and its role in influencing child viewing habits in this population.

# Methods

This qualitative study was conducted using in-depth semi-structured interviews. Interviews were conducted from February to August 2011 in participants' homes. Participants were a convenience sample recruited in the waiting room of a hospital-based academic general pediatric clinic that serves predominantly low-income Spanish-speaking families. Eligible participants were English- or Spanish-speaking women of Mexican heritage who identified themselves as the parent/caretaker of a child 2–5 years old. Mothers were excluded if they did not have a functioning television in the home. In-home interviews were scheduled for those who were interested and eligible. Enrollment of participants continued until no new themes were identified through ongoing review of participant interviews during the data collection phase. The study was approved by the institutional review board and informed consent was obtained from all participants.

The study team created a survey and interview guide based upon a review of the literature, topic discussions, and feedback gathered through pilot interviews. At the start of their interview, participants were orally administered a survey with questions relating to demographic characteristics and family and preschool child media habits. Mothers reported the amount of TV the child viewed on a typical weekday and weekend day. The research assistant then conducted an approximately 1 hour long, audiorecorded interview using the semi-structured interview guide. This started with a review of the child's activities on the day prior to the interview, after which broad open-ended questions followed by probes were utilized to facilitate discussion of participants' beliefs about child television viewing and parenting practices regarding television viewing. Questions on the media environment and family habits were also asked within the interview.

### Analyses

Audio recordings were transcribed and analyzed in the original language of the interview. Transcripts were analyzed using a theoretical thematic analytic approach. <sup>27</sup> First we familiarized ourselves with the data through readings and discussions of the transcripts. From these discussions, as well as a review of the literature related to parental beliefs regarding media and media parenting practices, we created a list of codes. This list was then modified and additional codes were created through an iterative and collaborative process of creating and revising the codes to best reflect the content of the interviews. Two authors then independently coded all transcripts. The software program Atlas.ti (version 6.2, Berlin) was used for coding. To ensure a shared understanding of the codes by both reviewers, 3 separately coded transcripts were compared. The  $\kappa$  coefficient for these three transcripts was 0.84, suggesting substantial agreement. Double coding was then completed for the remaining transcripts. Any coding discrepancies were discussed between the two reviewers and resolved. Representative quotes were selected for the major themes. Quotes were translated and back-translated to ensure accurate representation. Themes were organized into three categories - content viewed, amount viewed, and context of viewing. Themes not fitting clearly within these 3 categories were placed in an additional category, "Other beliefs/practices".

#### Results

#### Demographics

Participants (n=21) were all immigrants with an average of 8.4 (SD=4.2, range=3–21) years residing in the US. All participants preferred to be interviewed in Spanish. Nearly half of the participants reported a  $6^{\text{th}}$  grade education or less. The focal children were an average age of 3.4 years (SD=0.7). Other participant characteristics are presented in Table 1.

#### Media environment and habits

The majority of mothers reported that their preschool child typically watched 2 or more hours of television daily on weekdays (range=0.5-6.5; Table 1). Homes had an average of 2.1 televisions (SD=0.7, range=1-4), all had cable service, and all but 1 had DVD players. The majority of the children had a TV in the room where they slept (n=14), with 10 of these 14 children sleeping in their parent's room.

#### Major themes regarding beliefs and parenting practices

**Content viewed**—Mothers reported strong beliefs about the content available on TV and this led to active parenting in this area.

**Beliefs:** Participants expressed many beliefs about TV programming content and its appropriateness and impact on young children. Although beliefs varied, overall these beliefs were equally positive and negative.

On the positive side, participants had numerous beliefs about the educational value of television content. Overwhelmingly, they recognized the educational potential of TV viewing for children in this age group. A handful of participants commented that children

"are like sponges", referring to how much children learn from the TV at young ages. Participants were enthusiastic about the instructional content in certain programs. They expressed approval of school preparation-based content (shapes, colors, new words) as well as prosocial behaviors portrayed in these programs. Numerous mothers also noted how their children learned words in English from watching TV.

He has learned many things with this program because he learns the colors, the numbers, and recognizes shapes like triangles, like circles, and like things in English and they say them in Spanish.

Mothers commented on the entertainment value of their child watching television, remarking positively about their child's interactions with some TV programs, such as the times their child danced with characters on TV or verbally responded to questions from TV characters.

Mothers were equally strong in their beliefs that certain content was inappropriate for their young child. All mothers spoke about the potential negative influence of some content, such as violence, sexual scenes, inappropriate language, or socially unacceptable behavior (burping, sexy dancing).

If he was going to see violence, this has to be stopped because the television teaches a lot about hitting, a lot about theft, drugs.

Like sometimes they see violent programs on TV, I wouldn't like him to see this type of programs because he is growing and well, I think it is better to see things that& he is learning good things, not bad.

A particular concern was the fear that their child would imitate violent, fanciful, or socially inappropriate behaviors seen on TV.

I have seen my husband when he watches boxing, my son later wants to box with his sibling. That's why I don't like it when they watch those kinds of shows, because he learns everything.

He started hitting his little sister a lot in the stomach. He said he was "Ten-Men" and that he was very strong and I don't know what else.

Several participants felt that TV viewing is insufficient for adequate cognitive development. They remarked that children could not learn all they needed to know from the TV and that exposure beyond the TV is needed.

All day watching TV, you don't learn other things other than from the TV; this is also a vice, right?

Only in response to a specific question on the topic did mothers mention the content of television commercials. Some mothers (n=7) noted that their child was influenced by food commercials. Many commented that their child's response to viewing commercials included requests for specific foods shown. These remarks were largely quite factual, with only a few mothers expressing clear opinions as to whether such influence was positive or negative.

**Parenting Practices:** Stemming from the strong parental beliefs about television content, parenting practices in this area were strong. Mothers commonly reported forbidding certain content types or programs. Most commonly cited restrictions related to the following types of content: sexual scenes, violence, or bad language. When such content appeared on the television, mothers reported asking their child to change the channel. Mothers also described limiting their child to viewing only specific types of content (e.g. cartoons), or limiting them to a few channels. No mother mentioned limiting advertising content.

I don't let them watch anything but cartoons. There are only 2 channels and if not those, then movies. Pure movies, I am telling you that I have seen that there is no violence.

Also mentioned was the need to monitor the content their child was viewing. Mothers felt they needed to be aware of what their child was watching. Some linked this to their awareness that children are always learning and hence a parent must always be aware.

One needs to pay a lot of attention to this - in what they watch because they want to do everything that they see on TV. What one does, they also want to do.

Mothers similarly reported using some instructive practices regarding the content their child viewed. Most frequently cited was the need to respond to questions their child had about TV content, e.g. "what does this mean?"

"And mom, why did the child travel to another world and I cannot travel?" she (her child) says. "Because cartoons are not the same as us." I say, "because it is only a cartoon, this does not happen in real life." I say, "When have you seen a duck talk?"

Moreover, participants also recounted times when they explained to their child why they cannot watch certain types of content. For example, they would often include an explanatory comment as to why the child needed to change the channel when a specific type of `inappropriate' content was showing. Although less common, some participants mentioned pointing out good things shown in TV programs.

Later, he is sitting and I told him, "You see her? She had to study to be in front of the TV", or, "You see these colors, you need to know those colors because if not, you are not going to know what color this is."

**Amount viewed**—Compared to content viewed, participants spoke less frequently about the time their child spent watching TV.

**Beliefs:** Themes related to beliefs about time spent viewing TV all related excessive viewing. Numerous mothers commented on the health impact of television viewing, particularly the possibility of damage to their child's eyes from excessive viewing.

I believe it is ok for them to watch it, but just a little bit. Not for long periods because they are young and, I believe the TV can, sometimes, hurt one's eyes.

Only 2 mothers made any reference to a relationship between excessive viewing and obesity.

I know that the TV is not good because it hurts him in many ways... Including his vision, behavior... so much lying around, eating in bed, only watching TV, they gain weight.

Many mothers felt that the time their child watched TV should be broken up into shorter episodes of viewing. Related comments implied that it was not the total amount of time viewed, but rather how the time was split up. Viewing for hours was not appropriate, but if that same quantity of time was split up over the day, it was fine.

There are 3 hours, but with pauses. I feel it is a lot if you are watching TV for 3 hours in a row.

A handful of participants felt that watching "too" much TV led to unacceptable behavior or did not contribute to positive cognitive development.

There are kids that if you let them play a lot (of videogames) or watch a lot of TV, they don't listen. Like in Juan's case, I said "Juan, are you listening to me?" Juan doesn't react, he is focused on what he is seeing, and that's why I don't like it.

Sometimes they get dumb with the TV on and I don't let them, because the TV makes them dumb.

**Parenting practices:** Practices related to restriction of when or how much a child could watch TV were not as defined as restrictions related to content. Only two mothers reported having specific *rules* about time. One of these mothers commented on rules related to when their child could watch and one reported a rule that the child could not watch "too much." The remaining mothers did not specify rules about time when asked.

The practice of limiting viewing to episodes of viewing rather than long blocks of viewing was common. Mothers additionally reported limiting viewing based on their child's schedule and higher priority activities, such as the need to eat or go to bed.

And she always says, "Mom, turn it on. Don't turn it off. Why did you turn it off? Turn it on for a little bit." And I say, "No, because we are going to sleep." so she can sleep too.

Some referred to a general restriction of time, with the majority acknowledging that children can view "too much" television, but only 1 mentioned restricting viewing to a set amount of time daily. Restricting viewing amounts based on the child's behavior was also mentioned. If the child was not responsive to the mother or was thought to be sitting for too long then the TV was turned off.

I have to check them, because, you know why, sometimes they become foolish with TV and I don't let them.

**Context of viewing**—The most common theme related to the context of child viewing was co-viewing, or reports of watching TV together. Mothers also commented on watching TV during mealtimes.

Thompson et al.

**Beliefs:** Mothers spoke positively about the family routine of watching TV together, whether it was a frequent or infrequent event. In relation to mealtime, many participants expressed concern about how television viewing during mealtimes led to slow or inadequate food intake.

When I have the TV on he is so... watching it so that he doesn't even want to eat.

**Parenting Practices:** In relation to the parenting practices regarding the context of viewing, the most common theme again was parental co-viewing. Mothers reported co-viewing with their child in different scenarios. Most reported a routine activity for family members (mother or father or both) of co-viewing TV content together with their child. Often one or both of the parents were viewing their own shows and the child was either watching with them or sitting next to them with occasional attention to the TV program. For example, mothers mentioned their children watching shows with them or watching sports with their father. Other parents co-viewed cartoons or child shows with their child because the child asked the parent to watch with them and still others did it because they enjoyed the type of content the child was watching. Although not defined strictly as co-viewing, parents also reported being together at night in the same room with their children, with the parents watching their own TV shows and the child playing.

Restricting viewing during mealtime, either by having meals out of the line of sight of the TV or by not allowing the TV to be on, was common. Snacking while viewing appeared to be handled differently than meals; many of the mothers who restricted TV viewing while eating meals did not report doing the same for snacks. Moreover, mothers who did not restrict viewing with meals also did not report restricting viewing with snacks.

#### Other beliefs/practices

**Behavior control:** It was common for mothers to report rewarding children with television viewing related to behaviors (e.g. cleaning up a room or brushing their teeth). Placing limits on viewing time was also utilized as a way to punish children for not behaving.

Well, it depends, because sometimes I punish them and I tell them "You are not going to watch TV" and if they behave, they can watch TV an hour and a half.

**Direct value to mother:** Mothers also reported a direct value to themselves when their preschooler watched TV. They often did household chores or rested while the child viewed TV.

# Discussion

The aim of this study was to explore maternal parenting practices and beliefs regarding preschooler TV viewing in a sample of low-income women of Mexican origin in order to better understand how family level factors influence TV viewing habits in this population. These findings help further our understanding of how parents socialize their young children around TV viewing and can inform the design of interventions targeting child TV viewing behaviors in this specific population.

Thompson et al.

Reducing the amount of TV children view has been the focus of numerous interventions and organizational recommendations. <sup>5,28</sup> The AAP currently recommends that parents limit their children's entertainment screen media to less than 1–2 hours a day. <sup>8</sup> Defined time restrictions were not commonly reported by study participants. This is in keeping with other findings that parental time restrictions are less common than content restrictions. <sup>22,29</sup> Participants did report some time restrictive practices, however. One specific practice warrants further evaluation; mothers in our study commonly reported limiting viewing to short episodes, saying that viewing in short blocks versus longer periods of time was better for the child. Whether this practice results in decreased overall viewing time, or in lower obesity rates, is unknown, but it is worth investigating. Recommending shorter episodes of viewing through the day may be more palatable and feasible for parents to implement than counting up total daily viewing time. This practice may simply be more practical for busy parents. To our knowledge, this specific practice has not been reported in other studies.

Despite the absence of strict time restrictions, mothers did believe that excessive viewing was problematic, either leading to behavior issues or negatively affecting a child's vision. Similar concerns were reported in a qualitative study involving a diverse group of parents of older children. In that study, children's behavior, such as "tuning out", prompted parents to tell their children to stop watching TV. <sup>29</sup> Although the link between excessive TV hours and child obesity has received a great deal of attention, this issue was not a main concern in our sample. Few mothers commented on this relationship, which is in contrast to findings in other studies. <sup>24,29</sup> For example, in a recent study of Latino parents of overweight and obese 5–8 year olds, obesity was listed as a main outcome expectation of child TV viewing. <sup>24</sup> Our focus on parents of younger children may explain these differences, given the evidence that parents of younger children are less likely to classify their obese child as obese compared to parents of older children. <sup>30</sup> Overweight may not be a main concern of parents of preschoolers and therefore not a main motivator for limiting viewing amounts.

Mothers had a great deal to say about the content their children were exposed to on TV. They strongly believed in the educational value of TV viewing for their preschool children. This belief is likely reinforced by the multitude of widely available educational programs targeting this age group of children (e.g. Sesame Street, Barney). Evidence supports the educational benefits of many TV programs targeting preschoolers. The educational value placed on TV content may be more prominent in parents of preschoolers, given the greater prevalence of educational programming targeting this age group compared to school aged children. Some studies of parents of older children report similar viewpoints about the educational value of TV, but others do not. <sup>24,29</sup> Borzekowski et al reported that Latina mothers with lower educational levels were more likely to endorse the educational value of TV viewing that those with higher educational levels. <sup>23</sup> Given our sample size, we were unable to evaluate this relationship.

In addition to seeing the positive value of specific content, mothers were well aware of the potential negative impact of certain types of content. Mothers clearly outlined categories of content that their child was not allowed to view as well as their practices for limiting content. Mothers did not describe, however, any parenting practices focused on restricting their child's exposure to food and drink marketing. Moreover, most statements about such

commercials and their impact on their child were expressed in a neutral way without judgment as to whether viewing advertising content was good or bad for their child. Given the increasing evidence demonstrating the influence of advertisements on children's food beliefs and preferences <sup>31</sup>, more evaluation of parenting practices in this area is needed.

In regard to the context of child viewing, findings about viewing while eating deserve note. The AAP currently recommends that providers counsel parents on limiting media use during meals. Excessive TV viewing is associated with childhood obesity, and eating while watching TV has been shown in some studies to be associated with poorer dietary intake. <sup>5,32,33</sup> In our sample, limiting viewing during mealtimes was common. For most participants, viewing during mealtime was limited because parents were concerned that it distracted their child and caused them to not eat *enough* at mealtimes. Mothers' concern about their child eating *enough* needs further investigation as does mothers' contrasting restrictive practices for TV viewing during meals versus snacks. In our study, mothers who restricted TV during meals commonly reported that their child snacked while viewing. We did not further explore this topic in this study, but it may be due to parents viewing snacking differently than meals. <sup>34</sup>

A few limitations of this study warrant mention. All study participants were immigrants to the US with a range of years residing in the US. Participants were also all of Mexican origin. These findings therefore may only represent immigrant Latina mothers of Mexican origin. An evaluation of these findings in a more heterogeneous sample of Latinos would be valuable, given the growing evidence that viewing habits may vary between Latino subgroups. <sup>14</sup> The possibility of selection bias also exists, given that interviews occurred in participants' homes and some mothers may therefore not have been interested. Quantitative methods and longitudinal study designs are needed to further evaluate these findings, their prevalence in larger samples, and their relationship to important child outcomes, such as dietary patterns, obesity, and school performance.

#### Implications for practice

Ecological models suggest that numerous factors at the child, family, and societal level influence child development. <sup>35</sup> This study focused on family level factors, in particular parenting practices and beliefs, involved in socializing young children regarding TV viewing. There are important implications from our findings that should be considered in the design of interventions targeting viewing behaviors in Mexican-origin families.

Interventionists focused on television time reductions may want to consider more nuanced recommendations regarding time spent viewing TV, such as the common practice in this sample of limiting viewing to shorter episodes of viewing. Another option would be to recommend limiting viewing during specific times of the day such as around bedtime or mealtimes. Limiting viewing due to higher priority activities was common in this sample and has been reported in other studies.<sup>29</sup> Such nuanced recommendations may be easier for busy or overwhelmed parents to enact. As for reasons to offer mothers about why they should limit their child's viewing amounts, prevention of obesity will unlikely be a motivator unless interventions include information on the link between excessive viewing and childhood obesity. Interventionists recommending limited viewing amounts in this age

group should be aware of mothers' views of the functional purposes of TV viewing in their home. Mothers had positive views of the educational role of TV programming. Moreover, educational benefits may be particularly important for low-income populations, given the lower levels of school readiness and lack of childcare opportunities that provide more formal educational instruction, including English-language learning. <sup>36,37</sup>

Another functional use of the TV expressed by participants was that TV viewing allowed mothers to accomplish household tasks. This direct parental benefit of child viewing has been noted in other studies. <sup>29,38,39</sup> Although this "babysitting" role often has negative connotations, there may be no negative consequences of this practice, as long as the child's caregiver is able to limit the content and amount viewed by the child. For many parents, however, limiting TV viewing time may be a challenge, if parents perceive a lack of alternative activities for their children. <sup>38</sup> Interventions could offer alternative ways for mothers to accomplish necessary tasks, such as involving the child in the chores in an age-appropriate way, listening to audio books with the book in front of the child, or having special toys that are only brought out when the mother needs to complete a task, thus making the toys more interesting to the child.

Finally, our results, as well as those of other studies, suggest that interventions could benefit by focusing on the family as a unit when addressing TV viewing habits. <sup>29,39</sup> Other studies have reported that parents perceive time spent co-viewing as "family time." <sup>29,40</sup> Changing such habits may be difficult, since multiple family members are involved, and as Evans et al point out, asking parents to alter TV viewing habits may be asking them to change an activity that shapes the normal routine of the household. <sup>38</sup> Alternative family activities obviously exist, but if families are resistant to eliminating family TV time, advice could be given to parents to use the opportunity to educate their child on the topics viewed. Mothers in our sample reported doing this mostly in response to child questioning. But more active discussion about something seen on TV could be of value, given that instructive practices may alter the impact of certain types of content on children. <sup>41,42</sup> For example, parental instruction on advertising is associated with fewer requests for advertised products. <sup>41</sup>

#### Conclusion

Television viewing is associated with numerous poor outcomes in children including childhood obesity, poor school outcomes, and aggressive behavior. <sup>5–7</sup> Parents play a role in shaping childhood viewing habits which once established, tend to track over time. <sup>26</sup> The findings here further our understanding of the home context around viewing in a low-income Mexican-origin population. The results suggest that Mexican-origin mothers and other populations share beliefs and practices. Our findings on the educational value of programming, the lack of concern for excessive viewing leading to obesity, the concern about not eating enough while viewing, the lack of limits on viewing of advertising content, and the preference for shorter episodes of viewing are important contributions of this study to the greater literature of this field. Further research will inform how these beliefs and practices relate to viewing behaviors and associated health outcomes. In the meantime, interventionists targeting child viewing habits should design their intervention with an understanding of these findings and consideration as to whether their recommendations

related to parenting practices regarding child TV viewing are consistent with or potentially conflict with current parental beliefs or practices as described in this study.

# Acknowledgments

Funding: Research reported in this publication was supported by the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health & Human Development of the National Institutes of Health under award number K23HD060666 (PI: Thompson). The content is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the official views of the National Institutes of Health.

## References

- Boynton-Jarrett R, Thomas TN, Peterson KE, Wiecha J, Sobol AM, Gortmaker SL. Impact of television viewing patterns on fruit and vegetable consumption among adolescents. Pediatrics. 2003; 112(6 Pt 1):1321–1326. [PubMed: 14654604]
- Christakis DA, Zimmerman FJ. Violent television viewing during preschool is associated with antisocial behavior during school age. Pediatrics. Nov 1; 2007 120(5):993–999. 2007. [PubMed: 17974736]
- Thompson DA, Christakis DA. The association between television viewing and irregular sleep schedules among children less than 3 years of age. Pediatrics. 2005; 116(4):851–856. [PubMed: 16199693]
- Mares M-L, Woodard E. Positive Effects of Television on Children's Social Interactions: A Meta-Analysis. Media Psychol. 2005; 7(3):301–322.
- Robinson TN. Television viewing and childhood obesity. Pediatr. Clin. North Am. 2001; 48(4): 1017–1025. [PubMed: 11494635]
- Hancox RJ, Milne BJ, Poulton R. Association of television viewing during childhood with poor educational achievement. Arch. Pediatr. Adolesc. Med. 2005; 159(7):614–618. [PubMed: 15996992]
- Robinson TN, Wilde ML, Navracruz LC, Haydel KF, Varady A. Effects of reducing children's television and video game use on aggressive behavior: a randomized controlled trial. Arch. Pediatr. Adolesc. Med. Jan; 2001 155(1):17–23. [PubMed: 11177057]
- Council on Communication and Media, American Academy of Pediatrics. Children, adolescents, obesity, and the media. Pediatrics. 2011; 128(1):201–208. [PubMed: 21708800]
- 9. Healthy People 2020. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; Washington, DC: 2010.
- Vandewater EA, Rideout VJ, Wartella EA, Huang X, Lee JH, Shim MS. Digital childhood: electronic media and technology use among infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. Pediatrics. 2007; 119(5):e1006–1015. [PubMed: 17473074]
- Feng D, Reed DB, Esperat MC, Uchida M. Effects of TV in the bedroom on young Hispanic children. American Journal of Health promotion : AJHP. 2011; 25(5):310–318. [PubMed: 21534833]
- 12. Rideout, V.; Lauricella, AR.; Wartella, E. Children, media, and race: Media use among white, black, hispanic, and asian american children. Center on Media and Human Development, School of Communication, Northwestern University; Evanston, IL: 2011.
- Kumanyika S, Grier S. Targeting Interventions for Ethnic Minority and Low-Income Populations. The Future of Children. 2006; 16(1):187–207. [PubMed: 16532664]
- Thompson DA, Matson PA, Ellen JM. Television viewing in low-income Latino children: variation by ethnic subgroup and English proficiency. Childhood obesity. Feb; 2013 9(1):22–28. [PubMed: 23301653]
- Thompson DA, Sibinga EMS, Jennings JM, Bair-Merritt MH, Christakis DA. Television viewing by young Hispanic children: Evidence of heterogeneity. Archives of Pediatrics Adolescent Medicine. 2010; 164(2):174–179. [PubMed: 20124147]
- Gorely T, Marshall SJ, Biddle SJ. Couch kids: correlates of television viewing among youth. Int. J. Behav. Med. 2004; 11(3):152–163. [PubMed: 15496343]

- O'Connor TM, Hingle M, Chuang RJ, et al. Conceptual understanding of screen media parenting: report of a working group. Childhood obesity. Aug; 2013 9(Suppl):S110–118. [PubMed: 23944919]
- Montano, DE.; Kasprzyk, D. The theory of reasoned action and the theory of planned behavior. In: Glanz, K.; Rimer, BK.; Marcus Lewis, F., editors. Health Behavior and Health Education. Wiley & Sons; San Francisco, CA: 2002.
- Bleakley A, Piotrowski JT, Hennessy M, Jordan A. Predictors of parents' intention to limit children's television viewing. J Public Health (Oxf). Dec; 2013 35(4):525–532. [PubMed: 23335598]
- 20. Nathanson AI. Parent and child perspectives on the presence and meaning of parental television mediation. Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media. 2001:45.
- Warren R. Parental Mediation of Preschool Children's Television Viewing. Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media. 2003; 47(3):394–417. 2003/09/01.
- 22. Vandewater EA, Park S, Huang X, Wartella EA. "No--You can't watch that": Parental rules and young children's media use. Am. Behav. Sci. 2005; 48(5):608–623.
- 23. Borzekowski, DLG.; Poussaint, AF. Latino American Preschools and the Media. The Annenberg Public Policy Center; University of Pennsylvania: 1998.
- 24. del Rio Rodriguez B, Hilmers A, O'Connor TM. Hispanic Parents of Overweight and Obese Children and Their Outcome Expectations for Children's Television Viewing: A Qualitative Study. Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior. 2013; 45(6):718–722. [PubMed: 23850016]
- 25. Ennis, SR.; Rios-Vargas, M.; Albert, NG. The Hispanic Population: 2010. US Census Bureau; Washington DC: May. 2011
- Certain LK, Kahn RS. Prevalence, Correlates, and Trajectory of Television Viewing Among Infants and Toddlers. Pediatrics. 2002; 109(4):634–642. [PubMed: 11927708]
- 27. Braun V, Clarke V. Using thematic analysis in psychology. Qualitative Research in Psychology. 2006; 3(2):77–101.
- Epstein LH, Roemmich JN, Robinson JL, et al. A randomized trial of the effects of reducing television viewing and computer use on body mass index in young children. Arch. Pediatr. Adolesc. Med. 2008; 162(3):239–245. [PubMed: 18316661]
- Jordan AB, Hersey JC, McDivitt JA, Heitzler CD. Reducing children's television-viewing time: A qualitative study of parents and their children. Pediatrics. Nov 1; 2006 118(5):e1303–e1310. 2006. [PubMed: 17079531]
- Maynard LM, Galuska DA, Blanck HM, Serdula MK. Maternal perceptions of weight status of children. Pediatrics. May; 2003 111(5 Pt 2):1226–1231. [PubMed: 12728143]
- McGinnis, JM.; Gootman, JA.; Kraak, VI. Food marketing to children and youth :threat or opportunity?. National Academies Press; Washington, D.C.: 2006.
- Feldman S, Eisenberg ME, Neumark-Sztainer D, Story M. Associations between watching TV during family meals and dietary intake among adolescents. J Nutr Educ Behav. 2007; 39(5):257– 263. [PubMed: 17826345]
- Blass EM, Anderson DR, Kirkorian HL, Pempek TA, Price I, Koleini MF. On the road to obesity: Television viewing increases intake of high-density foods. Physiol. Behav. 2006; 88(4–5):597– 604. [PubMed: 16822530]
- 34. Fisher JO, Wright G, Herman A, et al. Snacks are not food: low-income mothers' definitions and feeding practices around child snacking. Journal of the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology. 2013; 27:231.231.
- 35. Gauvain, M.; Cole, M., editors. Readings on the Development of Children. Worth Publishers; New York, New York: 2005. Bronfenbrenner U. Ecological Models of Human Development.
- Duncan GJ, Magnuson KA. Can family socioeconomic resources account for racial and ethnic test score gaps? Future Child. Spring;2005 15(1):35–54. [PubMed: 16130540]
- 37. Fuller B, Kagan SL, Caspary GL, Gauthier CA. Welfare reform and child care options for lowincome families. Future Child. Winter-Spring;2002 12(1):96–119. [PubMed: 11980041]
- 38. Evans CA, Jordan AB, Horner J. Only Two Hours?: A Qualitative Study of the Challenges Parents Perceive in Restricting Child Television Time. J Fam Issues. 2011; 32(9):1223–1244.

- Dorey E, Roberts V, Maddison R, Meagher-Lundberg P, Dixon R, Ni Mhurchu C. Children and television watching: a qualitative study of New Zealand parents' perceptions and views. Child Care Health Dev. 2010; 36(3):414–420. [PubMed: 19961500]
- 40. Lindsay, AC.; Sussner, KM.; Greaney, ML.; Peterson, KE. Health education & behavior : the official publication of the Society for Public Health Education. 2008. Influence of social context on eating, physical activity, and sedentary behaviors of Latina mothers and their preschool-age children.
- Buijzen M, Valkenburg PM. Parental Mediation of Undesired Advertising Effects. Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media. 2005; 49(2):153–165.
- 42. Nathanson AI, Cantor J. Reducing the Aggression-Promoting Effect of Violent Cartoons By Increasing Children's Fictional Involvement with the Victim: A Study of Active Mediation. Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media. 2000; 44(1):125–142. 2000/03/01.

# Table 1

Characteristics of Mexican-origin mothers (n=21) participating in semi-structured interviews focused on beliefs and practices regarding their preschooler's media use.

	Mean (SD) or Percent
Mother	
Age in years	27.6 (4.9)
Education Level	
6 <sup>th</sup> grade	48%
7–12 <sup>th</sup>	38%
> High school	10%
missing	5%
Marital Status	
Single	29%
Married/Partnered	71%
Employed	19%
Years in US	8.4 (4.2)
>1 child at home	95%
Televisions in home	2.1 (0.7)
Focal Child	
Age in years	3.4 (0.7)
Daily hours of TV-Weekday	2.0 (1.4)
Daily hours of TV-Weekend	2.2 (1.9)
Exceed AAP Guidelines on Weekdays	55%
(View 2 hours TV)	
TV in sleep room	67%
Child sleeps in parents' room	57%