

Citation: Ananny, M. (2006). Managing media ecologies: Relationships between children's media usage, rebellious behavior and parental regulation. Paper presented at *International Communication Association Conference*, Dresden, Germany. June 19-23, 2006.

---

## **Managing Media Ecologies: Relationships between Children's Media Usage, Rebellious Behavior and Parental Regulation**

Mike Ananny | mja@stanford.edu

### **ABSTRACT**

This paper uses the Kaiser Family Foundation's 2004 "Kids and Media II" survey to investigate three relationships associated with families-as-organizations, children's behavior and parents media regulation: (i) how children's offline subversive behaviors (rule-breaking or rebelliousness not associated with media usage) relate to their media-associated subversive behaviors; (ii) how parental regulations used to control children's media usage relate to children's media-associated subversive behaviors; and (iii) how parental regulations used to control children's media usage relate to children's "offline" subversive behaviors (rule-breaking or rebelliousness not associated with media usage).

The analyses use Scott's (1995) institutional model as a framework to consider the regulatory, normative and cognitive-cultural influences on children's media environments, and to argue that new media offer unique opportunities to study how parents attempt to regulate children's media usage through a combination of technologies, rating systems, self-designed rules and social awareness.

## INTRODUCTION

How do we limit children's media experiences? Specifically, when parents or industries want to regulate children's media experiences do they rely on technologies, rules, social norms or some combination of all three? This paper posits that children's media are "occasions for structuring" (Barley, 1986). That is, the restrictions on children's media usage become opportunities to observe how parents express different visions of how they think their children's media relationships should be structured. If we think about children as individuals navigating both "online" (media-associated) and "offline" (media-independent) identities, about families as organizational ecologies with a variety of actors, and about household media as technologies that can be influenced through different means, then we may better understand how general parental goals for their children's behavior – and their children's actual behaviors – relate to children's experiences with media.

Few aspects of children's developmental environments have consistently attracted as much attention and concern as their exposure to, consumption of, and interactions with mass media. (For overviews, see Roberts *et al.*, 2003, Singer & Singer, 2002 and Wartella *et al.*, 2002.) Parents and media institutions use a variety of strategies to regulate or limit children's media exposure: V-chips and web site filters, co-viewing television and co-using computers, using media warnings and ratings, self-designed household rules limiting media time or content. How do parents use and combine these strategies? How effective are they in curbing "anti-social" child behavior? And how do children's media-associated anti-social behaviors relate to rebellious behavior in contexts independent of media?

Three aspects of the recent Kaiser Family Foundation's report "Kids and Media II" (Roberts, Foehr & Rideout, 2005) suggest that children's media usage is increasingly resembling an ecology in which purely time-based measures of exposure and regulation are no longer appropriate.

First, Roberts *et al.* (2005) found that while children are spending approximately the same amount of time using media in the last 5 years (6 hours, 21 minutes in 1999 versus 6 hours, 19 minutes in 2004), when time spent using more than one medium is taken into account, the total amount of time American children spend consuming media in a day has increased from 7 hours, 29 minutes to 8 hours 33 minutes. This is greater than an hour increase per day, constituting a longer day than is legally allowed for many American adult workers. They suggest that children have "hit a ceiling" in terms of the amount of time they spend with media in a given day and that their days involve interactions with a greater variety and complexity of media.

Second, new media (computers, Internet, videogames, satellite TV and DVDs) play are increasingly present in children's media environments. In 2004, 86% of children had home computers, compared to 73% in 1999. (Furthermore, 39% of children in 2004 had two or more computers at home compared to 25% in 1999.) In 2004, 74% of children had home Internet access compared to only 47% in 1999 while 82% of young people in 2004 lived in homes with satellite or cable TV, compared to 74% in 1999. DVD players also became more prevalent with the number of 8 to 18 year-olds living in homes with three or more VCRs or DVDs jumped from 26% in 1999 to 53% in 2004 (Roberts *et al.*, 2005).

Third, children's media use is increasingly taking place in private settings: "more of these media have migrated to young people's bedrooms: there are more young people with a VCR or DVD player (from 36% to 54%), with cable or satellite TV (from 29% to 37%), with computers (from 21% to 31%), and with Internet access (from 10% to 20%) in their bedrooms." (Roberts *et al.*, 2005) Videogame usage is also now private and portable: in 2004, 49% of children had a videogame console in their bedroom while 55% have a handheld videogame player. The study did not explicitly investigate the various uses of cell phones (they are increasingly converging to be technologies not just for voice communication but also for game playing, text messaging, instant messaging and social networking) but did find that 11% of children have a personal digital assistant and 13% have a handheld device that connects to the Internet.

Taken together, these three aspects of children's media usage – increasingly complex usage patterns as children hit a "time ceiling"; increasing prevalence of digital media; and increasingly private and mobile media usage – suggest that children are increasingly part of a "media ecology" (McLuhan, 2004) that is not easily described only by usage patterns but, rather, requires a more relational model in which family media environments are the product of available technologies, usage norms, and regulatory practices.

Gentile and Walsh (2002) make a similar point when they argue that

"media is not a discrete variable within the family environment; it is part of the rich interplay of variables that makes family life complex and formative. One of the gaps in our knowledge of family media usage has been the lack of a comprehensive picture of how average families relate to and interact with media. In other words, what are the media habits (e.g., usage, rules, monitoring, etc.) of the average family?" (Gentile and Walsh, 2002: 158)

How can parents manage or influence their children's media ecologies? Some evidence suggests that parents' perception of children's media use is a problem with parents generally underreporting the number of hours children watch television and the number of "problematic" shows they view (Strasburger & Donnerstein, 1999). Children may also display different usage, depending on the social situation: one survey found that 44% of children watch different television programs when they are alone versus when they are with their parents (Children Now, 1995). Co-viewing is thought to be an important mechanism for parents to influence their children's understanding of TV since it provides an opportunity to simultaneously filter and discuss media exposure (Center for Media Values, 1992).

Recent data show that parents are responding to the complex media ecology with in a variety of ways. Roberts *et al.* (2005) found that 46% of all 8- to 18-year-olds say that their families have rules about watching TV and go on to report a variety of techniques parents use to regulate children's media usage:

- 36% of 7<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> graders report having to complete chores or homework before being allowed to watch TV, 14% report parents having rules about how much time they are allowed to watch TV (but only 20% of those with rules report that the rules are enforced "most" of the time), and 6% say their parents use a V-chip or similar technology to control TV watching;
- 23% of households have rules about what children are allowed to do on the computer, 23% limit the amount of time children can spend using the

- computer and 25% of children with a home computer report their parents using filters or controls
- 16% of children's parents limit the types of music their children can listen to while 14% check parental advisories on music;
  - 12% of children say their parents restrict the types of videogames children are allowed to play, 17% have limits on the amount they can play videogames, and 10% say their parents use videogame advisories to limit access;
  - 61% of children reported watching TV with someone else "most" or "some" of the time (57% of these with a brother or sister, 41% of these with mother and 27% of these with father)
  - 25% of children reported using the computer with someone else "most" or "some" of the time (40% of these with a friend, 27% of these with a brother or sister, 17% with mother).

Note, though, that although parents may call for industry-regulated mechanisms, it is not clear that they effectively use them to influence their children's media experiences: only 14% of parents were able to explain 9 out of 11 television rating symbols and only 22% with children under 10 years could name one the ratings of their children's shows (Kaiser Family Foundation, 1998).

In general, there seem to be three distinct ways emerging in which parents regulate children's media consumption in the new-old mix of media: relying on technologies (e.g. V-chips and computer filters) and rating systems; using self-designed

rules to place limits on time or content of media consumption; and using media with children in social, family situations.

The empirical aim of this paper is to understand three elements of this media regulation landscape. First, how do children's offline subversive behaviors (rule-breaking or rebelliousness not associated with media usage) relate to their media-associated subversive behaviors? Second, how do the various parental regulations used to control children's media usage relate to children's media-associated subversive behaviors. Third, how do various parental regulations used to control children's media usage relate to children's "offline" subversive behaviors (rule-breaking or rebelliousness not associated with media usage)?

## **METHODS**

This investigation uses the 2004 Kaiser Family Foundation Survey "Kids and Media II" (Roberts *et al.*, 2005), an update of the 1999 Kaiser Family Foundation study "Kids and Media @ the New Millennium." The 2004 survey repeats many of the questions that appeared on the 1999 survey and also includes a greater emphasis on newer media (e.g. digital technologies).

The survey was based on a nationally representative sample of 2,032 students aged 8 to 18 years (grades 3 through 12) conducted between October 14, 2003 and March 19, 2004. The margin of sampling error is +/- 3.8% and the sample was obtained using a stratified, two-stage national probability model: the first stage involved randomly selecting schools from a list of 80,000 public, private and parochial US schools while the second stage involved randomly selecting participating grades and classes within grades.

The study over-samples African-American and Hispanic students to support between-group ethnic comparisons.

## **FINDINGS**

### **A) Offline Rule-Breaking versus Online Rule-Breaking.**

The first relationship investigated is how children's offline subversive behaviors (rebelliousness not associated with media usage) relate to their media-associated subversive behaviors. That is, do children who break rules associated with media (defying parental oversight, for example) also engage in behavior in "offline" settings that may be considered risky or troublesome? The aim here is to sketch possible correlative relationships between rule-breaking behavior within and outside of media-heavy contexts. The survey asked about 4 "rule-breaking" behaviors associated with media:

1. Have you ever pretended to be older than you are to gain access to a website?
2. Have you ever gone to an R-rated movie in a theater without your parents?<sup>1</sup>
3. Have you ever listened to music that you know your parents don't want you to listen to?
4. Have you ever played video games that you know your parents don't want you to play?

The survey also asks 4 questions that address risky or rule-breaking actions or tendencies in environments that do not explicitly mention media usage. To each of the following

---

<sup>1</sup> It is possible that children may have answered this question positively thinking of a time they had seen an R-rated movie with a family member or adult friend who was sanctioned by their parents. For the purposes of this study, I assume that this behavior represents a defiance of parental oversight.

questions children were asked to respond whether the statements sound “a lot like me”, “somewhat like me”, “not much like me” or “not at all like me” (the categories were coded on a continuous scale from 1 to 4):

1. I like friends who are exciting, even if they are wild.
2. I sometimes choose friends my parents disapprove of.
3. I like new and exciting experiences, even if I have to break the rules.
4. I get into trouble a lot.

To investigate whether there are any relationships between offline and online rule-breaking behavior, bivariate Pearson correlations were calculated for each type of behavior. Table 1 summarizes the findings.

**TABLE 1: Pearson Correlations between Offline and Online Rule-Breaking Behaviors or Tendencies**

		Online, Media-Associated Rule-Breaking Behaviors			
		Pretended to be older than I am to gain access to a website	Gone to an R-rated movie in a theater without my parents	I have listened to music that I know my parents don’t want me to listen to	I have played videogames that I know my parents don’t want me to play
Offline Rule-Breaking Behaviors or Tendencies  1=Not at all like me 4=A lot like me	I like friends who are exciting, even if they are wild	.178(**)	.159(**)	–	–
	I sometimes choose friends my parents disapprove of	.154(**)	.090 (**)	–	.080 (**)
	I like new and exciting experiences, even if I have to break the rules	.248(**)	.176(**)	–	–
	I get into trouble a lot	.131(**)	.088(**)	–	–

( \*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level, 1-tailed; – = not significant)

More complex statistical tests should be conducted but these preliminary findings suggested a possible relationship between offline rule-breaking and particular *kinds* of media-associated rule-breaking. Specifically, the pattern seen in the above correlations may be explained by grouping the media-associated rule-breaking as follows:

1. **Media access regulated by parents:** a) I have listened to music that I know my parents don’t want me to listen to; b) I have played video games that I know my parents do not want me to play.
2. **Media access regulated by industry:** a) pretended to be older than I am to gain access to a website; b) gone to an R-rated movie in a theatre without my parents.

To investigate whether this pattern in parent-regulated media versus industry-regulated media also exists in children’s behaviors (independent of offline rule-breaking), a second set of Pearson correlations were calculated to see correlations among media-associated rule-breaking behaviors. Table 2 summarizes these findings.

**TABLE 2: Pearson Correlations Among Rule-Breaking Behaviors Where Media Access Regulated by Parents Versus Industry**

	<b>Gone to an R-rated movie in a theater without my parents</b>		
<b>Pretended to be older than I am to gain access to a website</b>	.381(**)	<b>Pretend to be older than I am to gain access to a website</b>	
<b>I have listened to music that I know my parents don’t want me to listen to</b>	–	–	<b>I have listened to music that I know my parents don’t want me to listen to</b>
<b>I have played videogames that I know my parents don’t want me to play</b>	–	–	.109(**)

( \*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level, 1-tailed; – = not significant)

The correlations in Table 2 seem to suggest that children who break parent-defined media rules (operationalized here as listening to unapproved music and playing unapproved videogames) are less likely to also be children who break industry-defined media rules (operationalized here as gaining access to age-restricted websites and movies).

These relationships are intriguing but based on too small a set of questions to be robust. More focused questioning (posing more questions targeted toward this emerging framework) and more rigorous regressions (including path analyses for possible mediating factors) would be need to be conducted to confirm the trends these analyses suggestion. However, excepting the one correlation between choosing friends and playing videogames they know their parents disapprove of, there does seem to be an emerging correlation showing that children whose media access is regulated by parental controls – not industry regulations – are less likely to also be children who engage in offline risky or rebellious behavior.

## **B) Forms of Media Regulation versus Children's Media-Associated Rule-Breaking**

The second relationship investigated is how the various parental regulations used to control children's media usage relate to children's media-associated subversive behaviors. That is, how do children who break media-associated rules media experience those controls?

This analysis is guided by Scott's (1995) model of institutions in which he states that social frameworks are the supported by three mutually-influencing pillars: a regulative pillar (defining explicit rules and codes that govern what is possible in a

particular system); a normative pillar (denoting standards, practices and expectations specific to particular contexts or communities); a cognitive-cultural pillar (describing the schemas and relationships that define entities within the social system). In relation to studying the regulation of home-based family media ecologies, many of the survey's questions lent themselves to Scott's institutional pillars framework and were organized as such:

1. **Control through Standards (Regulative).** Children's media exposure is controlled through technologies or industry guidelines; related questions include:
  - i. *My parents use a V-chip or some other device that blocks shows or channels. (True/false)*
  - ii. *Are there any parental controls or filters on any computer in your home? (Yes/No/Don't Know)*
  - iii. *My parents check the parental warning or rating of the videogames I play. (True/false)*
  - iv. *My parents check the parental warning or rating of the music I listen to. (True/false)*
  
2. **Control through Self-Designed Rules (Normative).** Children's media exposure is controlled through parent-created rules that define expectations and standards within the home; related questions include:
  - i. *Does your family have any rules about watching television at your home? (Yes/No)*

ii. *My parents have rules about which videogames I can play.*

*(True/false)*

iii. *My parents have rules about how long I can play videogames.*

*(True/false)*

iv. *My parents have rules about what kind of music I can listen to.*

*(True/false)*

v. *My parents have rules about how long I can use the computer.*

*(True/false)*

vi. *My parents have rules about what I can do on the computer.*

*(True/false)*

3. **Control through awareness or collaboration (Cognitive-Cultural).** Children's media exposure is regulated by parents using media with children.

i. *When I watched TV with someone else yesterday, it was with my mother or father. (True/false)*

ii. *When I used the computer with someone else yesterday, it was with my mother or father. (True/false)*

iii. *My parents usually know what shows I'm watching on TV. (True/false)*

iv. *My parents usually know which websites I'm going to when I go on the Internet. (True/false)*

To investigate whether there may be correlations between children who experience media control in various forms (through regulative, normative or cognitive-cultural

Citation: Ananny, M. (2006). Managing media ecologies: Relationships between children's media usage, rebellious behavior and parental regulation. Paper presented at *International Communication Association Conference*, Dresden, Germany. June 19-23, 2006.

---

mechanisms) and children who break rules associated with media use (as defined by industry or parents), a series of bivariate Pearson correlations were calculated. Table 3 summarizes these findings.

Citation: Ananny, M. (2006). Managing media ecologies: Relationships between children's media usage, rebellious behavior and parental regulation. Paper presented at *International Communication Association Conference*, Dresden, Germany. June 19-23, 2006.

**TABLE 3: Pearson Correlations Among Rule-Breaking Behaviors Where Media Access Regulated by Parents and Industry Versus Home-Based Regulatory, Normative, Cognitive-Cultural Influence**

		Breaking Industry-Defined Media Access Rules		Breaking Parent-Defined Media Access Rules	
		Pretended to be older than I am to gain access to a website	Gone to an R-rated movie in a theater without my parents	I have listened to music that I know my parents don't want me to listen to	I have played videogames that I know my parents don't want me to play
<b>Regulatory Influence:</b> Through standards, technologies, industry guidelines	Parents Use V-Chip	--	--	.968(**)	.084(**)
	Parents Use Computer Controls or Filters	.149(**)	.192(**)	--	--
	Check videogame parental warnings	--	--	.102(**)	.999(**)
	Check music parental warnings	--	--	1.00 (**)	.109(**)
<b>Normative Influence:</b> Through self-designed rules and expectations	Rules on watching TV	--	--	.089(**)	.160(**)
	Rules on which playing video games	--	--	.102(**)	.999(**)
	Rules on how long play video games	--	--	.103(**)	.999(**)
	Rules on listening to music	--	--	1.00 (**)	.109(**)
	Rules on how long on computer	--	--	.060(**)	.147(**)
	Rules on what I can do on computer	--	--	.058(**)	.148(**)
<b>Cognitive-Cultural Influence:</b> Through co-use and awareness	Watched TV with mother or father	--	--	--	--
	Used computer with mother or father	--	--	--	-.068(**)
	Parents know what TV shows child is watching	--	--	.968(**)	.084(**)
	Parents know what websites child is visiting	--	--	.058(**)	.147(**)

The broad story told by these initial correlations is that there seems to be no relationship between children with controlled home-based media experiences (whether through regulatory, normative or cognitive-cultural means) and children who break industry-

defined media access rules. Note that the location of rule-breaking is different in each of the industry-regulated settings: children who pretend to be older to gain access to age-restricted websites generally do so at home but children who access an R-rated movie do so in a theater. It would be interesting to use the survey further to evaluate whether children who are pretending to be older to gain access to restricted websites are doing so using computers situated in open, public family settings or using the bedroom computers.

There does seem to be a consistent correlation that children who experience home-based media regulation are also children who break parent-defined media access rules. (The exception to this is the negative correlation that children who used computers with a mother or father were *less* likely to be children who played videogames their parents disapproved of. It would be interesting to tease apart whether videogame rule-breaking differs when children play games on videogame consoles [*e.g.* X-Box or Sega systems] versus when children play videogames on family computers.)

The consistently significant findings within the category of breaking parent-defined media access rules – but not within the category of breaking industry-defined media access rules – suggests that the previously noted distinction between parent- and industry-controlled media access is worth pursuing in more detail. Specifically, more targeted questions that focus on these distinctions and more robust (and causally relevant) statistical tests may reveal relationships that show how particular styles of control (*e.g.* those situated within the home or negotiated through parental awareness of children's media usage) may differentially affect certain kinds of rule-breaking (*e.g.* rebelling against industry- versus parent-defined standards).

Such questions related to the location of media usage and the mechanisms of regulation will be increasingly important as children's media consumption shifts among public sites (*e.g.* movie theaters), family sites (*e.g.* home DVD and computer use), private sites (*e.g.* children using the Internet or watching DVDs in their bedrooms) and mobile sites (*e.g.* children using handheld digital assistants and cell phones to communicate and watch movies). A broad but critical socio-technical question becomes how the *locations*, *means* and *agents* of children's media control relate to and complement each other.

### **C) Forms of Media Regulation versus Children's Offline Rule-Breaking**

The third relationship investigated is how the various parental regulations used to control children's media usage relate to children's offline subversive or rule-breaking behaviors. That is, are there any correlations between children who live in households with media-associated rules and children's propensity to engage in rebellious or risky behavior in non-media contexts?

The underlying concept under investigation is whether the controls or regulations that children experience in one context – when watching TV, playing videogames, using computers, listening to music – are correlated with their propensity to break rules in other contexts. More specifically, and using the three-pillar institutional framework developed earlier, do children who experience particular *types* of limits on media use (through regulation, normative expectations, cognitive-cultural awareness) also show tendencies to challenge limits in non-mediated contexts? The question goes to the issue of whether, generally, rules about media usage and, specifically, particular styles of rules are isolated

Citation: Ananny, M. (2006). Managing media ecologies: Relationships between children's media usage, rebellious behavior and parental regulation. Paper presented at *International Communication Association Conference*, Dresden, Germany. June 19-23, 2006.

and applicable only when children encounter media or whether they also affect more generalized, media-independent behavior.

To investigate these relationships, a series of bivariate Pearson correlations were calculated. Table 4 summarizes these findings.

**TABLE 4: Pearson Correlations Among Rule-Breaking Behaviors Where Media Access Regulated by Parents and Industry Versus Home-Based Regulatory, Normative, Cognitive-Cultural Influence**

		Offline Rule-Breaking Behaviors or Tendencies (1=Not at all like me; 4=A lot like me)			
		I like friends who are exciting, even if they are wild	I sometimes choose friends my parents disapprove of.	I like new and exciting experiences, even if I have to break the rules	I get into trouble a lot
<b>Regulatory Influence:</b> Through standards, technologies, industry guidelines	Parents Use V-Chip	--	.075(**)	--	--
	Parents Use Computer Controls or Filters	--	--	.126(**)	.086(**)
	Check videogame parental warnings	--	--	--	--
	Check music parental warnings	--	--	--	--
<b>Normative Influence:</b> Through self-designed rules and expectations	Rules on watching TV	--	.106(**)	--	--
	Rules on which playing video games	--	--	--	--
	Rules on how long play video games	--	--	--	--
	Rules on what kind of music can listen to	--	--	--	--
	Rules on how long on computer	--	--	--	-.060(**)
	Rules on what I can do on computer	--	--	--	-.060(**)
<b>Cognitive-Cultural Influence:</b> Through co-use and awareness	Watched TV with mother or father	--	--	--	--
	Used computer with mother or father	--	--	--	--
	Parents know what TV shows child is watching	--	--	--	--
	Parents know	--	--	--	.061(**)

Citation: Ananny, M. (2006). Managing media ecologies: Relationships between children's media usage, rebellious behavior and parental regulation. Paper presented at *International Communication Association Conference*, Dresden, Germany. June 19-23, 2006.

---

	what websites child is visiting				
--	------------------------------------	--	--	--	--

Although there are a few statistically significant correlations, the data are largely inconclusive, showing no patterns between children's offline rule-breaking behaviors or tendencies and parental controls on children's media usage (regardless of the type). More focused survey questions focusing on these uses – specifically, more questions evaluating children's rebellious or risky behavior in a variety of contexts – may help reveal any relationships between actions or tendencies in non-media environments and various forms of media-associated parental rules.

Specifically, three of offline behavior questions focus on actions or tendencies that parents may be unaware of or that children may not act upon (*i.e.* preferences for disapproved of friends and an affinity to new experiences that may involve rule-breaking). The fourth question focuses on children's actions that authority figures become aware of and possibly sanction. There may be a relationship between parents' awareness of their children's actions and their likelihood of imposing restrictions on children's media use.

On this third analysis, there are too few significant findings with which to draw conclusions.

## **CONCLUSION**

This paper is a first attempt to understand relationships between parents' attempts to regulate children's media environments and children's tendencies to rebel against those rules. Specifically, the paper asks three questions.

First, how do children's offline rule-breaking behaviors or tendencies relate to their media associated subversive behaviors? Preliminary results (based on arguably few targeted questions on this topic and only rudimentary statistical analyses) suggest that children whose media access is regulated by parental controls (as opposed to industry-regulated guidelines) are less likely to engage in offline risky behavior. In this analysis, children who break industry-regulated guidelines are likely to also be children who rebel in non-mediated environments.

This finding suggests that perhaps parental influences on children's media use are more likely to have effects beyond the immediate context in which media are consumed. General mechanisms designed to limit children's exposure to websites or movies may be effective in preventing access (although children can often find ways to subvert these controls) but they may have less influence on children's general tendencies to engage in rebellious behavior than when parents express specific preferences about what media they prefer their children to consume.

Second, the paper asks how various parental regulations used to influence or control children's media usage relate to children's media-associated rule-breaking behavior. Using Scott's (1995) institutional framework designed to address organizational ecologies, this analysis categorized parents' influences into three categories: regulatory, normative, and cognitive-cultural. Again, more targeted questions that address these three means explicitly would help draw stronger conclusions but the preliminary data suggest a consistent correlation between parents placing limits on media and children breaking parent-defined media access rules. It is important to remember that, since this analysis is correlational, no conclusions can be drawn about the causal

relationship between parents' rules and children's rule-breaking tendencies. It may be that parents impose media rules on children *because* they know their children are listening to unapproved music or playing unapproved music. Alternatively, it may be that children are actively rebelling against their parents' rules or controls by subversively gaining access to media they know their parents disapprove of. More study is needed to tease apart these causal relationships and to test any mediating factors but this initial analysis suggests an important correlation.

The third analysis investigated whether there are any relationships among various parentally-defined media regulations and children's tendencies to engage in offline subversive behavior. This analysis was the least conclusive and revealed no discernable patterns. It did, however, suggest a future research approach that examines more carefully parents' *awareness* of their children's offline behaviors (*e.g.* touched on with the question asking children whether they "get in trouble a lot") versus children's *tendencies* to engage in subversively rebellious offline behaviors (*e.g.* the likelihood of engaging in risky, rule-breaking experiences or choosing friends they think their parents disapprove of).

The broad conclusion that can be drawn from these three analyses is that more work is needed to understand relationships between the *locations*, *means*, and *agents* of control on children's media. As children interact with media in increasingly private and mobile settings, media rules (both family- and industry-defined) will need to respond accordingly. As children interact with a wider variety, extending beyond TV, magazines and movies to include a wide variety of Internet-supported experiences (many of which are being rapidly invented), the ways in which media access is understood by both

Citation: Ananny, M. (2006). Managing media ecologies: Relationships between children's media usage, rebellious behavior and parental regulation. Paper presented at *International Communication Association Conference*, Dresden, Germany. June 19-23, 2006.

---

parents and industry will need to change. And, as children's media access becomes influenced by an increasingly diverse set of actors (parents, industry representatives and the vast number of unregulated Internet content producers with few agreed-upon access controls), the community of people with the ability to influence children's media exposure will rapidly evolve.

In essence, as the locations, means and agents of media regulation diversify, those with vested interests in understanding and controlling children's media experiences may need to develop multi-faceted approaches that treat media environments as complex ecologies. This paper is an attempt to understand children's media usage in relation to the powerful regulatory, normative and cognitive-cultural elements that govern children's behaviors and tendencies.

Citation: Ananny, M. (2006). Managing media ecologies: Relationships between children's media usage, rebellious behavior and parental regulation. Paper presented at *International Communication Association Conference*, Dresden, Germany. June 19-23, 2006.

---

## REFERENCES

Barley, S. (1986). Technology as an Occasion for Structuring: Evidence from Observations of CT Scanners and the Social Order of Radiology Departments. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, March 1986.

Center for Media Values. (1992). Media Literacy. *Media & Values*, 59/60: 41-42.

Children Now (1995). *Sending Signals: Kids Speak Out About Values in the Media*. Los Angeles, CA: Children Now.

Gentile, D.A. & D.A. Walsh. (2002) A normative study of family media habits. *Applied Developmental Psychology*, 23 pp. 157-178.

Kaiser Family Foundation. (1998). *Parents, Children and the Television Ratings System: Two Kaiser Family Foundation Surveys*. Available at: <http://www.kff.org/entmedia/1398-index.cfm>. Last accessed October 31, 2005.

McLuhan, M. (2004). *Understanding Me: Lectures and Interviews*. McLuhan, S. & D. Staines (Eds.) MIT Press: Cambridge, MA.

Roberts, D. F., Foehr, U. G., Rideout, V. J., & Brodie, M. (1999). *Kids & media @ the new Millennium*. Menlo Park, CA: Kaiser Family Foundation. Available at: <http://www.kff.org/entmedia/1535-index.cfm>. Last accessed October 31, 2005.

Citation: Ananny, M. (2006). Managing media ecologies: Relationships between children's media usage, rebellious behavior and parental regulation. Paper presented at *International Communication Association Conference*, Dresden, Germany. June 19-23, 2006.

---

Roberts, D.F., Foehr, U.G., Rideout, V.R. & M. Brodie. (2003). *Kids and Media in America*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, UK.

Roberts, D.F., Foehr, U.G. & V.J. Rideout. (2005). *Generation M: Media in the Lives of 8-18 Year Olds*. Menlo Park, CA: Kaiser Family Foundation. Available at:  
<http://www.kff.org/entmedia/upload/Generation-M-Media-in-the-Lives-of-8-18-Year-olds-Report.pdf>. Last accessed October 31, 2005.

Singer, D.G. & J.L. Singer. (Eds.) (2002). *Handbook of Children and the Media*. SAGE Publications: Thousand Oaks.

Scott, W.R. (1995). *Institutions and Organizations*. Sage Press: Thousand Oaks.

Strasburger, V. C., & Donnerstein, E. (1999). Children, adolescents, and the media: issues and solutions. *Pediatrics*, 103, 129–139.

Walsh, D. A., & Gentile, D. A. (2001). A validity test of movie, television, and video game ratings. *Pediatrics*, 107, 1302–1308.

Wartella, E.A., J.H. Lee & A.G. Caplovitz. (2002). *Children and Interactive Media: Research Compendium Update*. Markle Foundation. Available at:

Citation: Ananny, M. (2006). Managing media ecologies: Relationships between children's media usage, rebellious behavior and parental regulation. Paper presented at *International Communication Association Conference*, Dresden, Germany. June 19-23, 2006.

---

[http://www.markle.org/downloadable\\_assets/cimcomp\\_update.pdf](http://www.markle.org/downloadable_assets/cimcomp_update.pdf). Last accessed

October 31, 2005.