UNDERSTANDING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF MORAL MEDIATION THROUGH THEORIES OF MORAL REASONING

DISSERTATION

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By

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ABSTRACT

This study sought to conceptualize moral mediation as a form of television mediation through the frameworks of social cognitive theory and moral developmental theory. Particularly, three types of moral mediation messages were examined for their immediate influence and parental influence on children’s post-viewing attitudes and moral reasoning of televised violence: judgment-only, consequence-based, and motive-based mediations.

A survey of parents and an experiment with their children were conducted. Survey data from 216 parents of children in kindergarten to fifth grade, in conjunction with the data from the children in the experiment, were collected to explore the parental influence of moral mediation on children. It was found that parents who discuss consequences of violent behavior on TV to their children can reduce the children’s acceptable attitudes toward televised violence.

The experiment, which included 201 children randomly assigned to conditions, revealed that all three types of moral mediation were conducive to the decrease of children’s positive attitudes toward televised violence. However, judgment-only mediation had the most effective immediate influence on children. As for consequence-based and motive-based mediation, they were more effective in encouraging children’s use of higher level moral reasoning strategies than judgment-only mediation.
These findings suggest that moral mediation comprises at least three message types and are effective in their own way.
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“No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him.” 1 Corinthians 2:9

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Enough research has evidenced the relationship between violence viewing and aggression (Huesmann, Lagerspetz, & Eron, 1984). Studies have also identified processes through which aggression can be developed by violence viewing. For example, violent TV can promote aggression through imitation, social learning of aggressive attitudes, accepting attitudes of aggression, and desensitization (Cantor & Wilson, 2003; Huesmann, Eron, Klein, Brice, & Fischer, 1983). Fortunately, promising mediation study results have confirmed that active mediation, talking to children about television content, can have a positive effect on altering violent TV’s aggression-promoting process. In a more general sense, correlational studies have found that parental active mediation to relate negatively with children’s aggressive inclinations (Nathanson, 1999). That is, the more parents actively mediate violent TV, the less aggressive their children will be.

Besides correlational studies, experimental research provided the opportunity to identify the type of outcomes active mediation can accomplish. These outcomes vary from behavior to attitude and to affect. Active mediation can decrease children’s imitation of the violent behavior portrayed on television (Grusec, 1973), positive attitudes toward aggression (Corder-Bolz, 1980), and orientation towards violent programs (Nathanson & Yang, 2003). Furthermore, it can counteract the
desensitization effect by affecting tolerance towards violence, more specifically, decreasing children’s latency to seek help from adults (Horton & Santogrossi, 1978).

Despite the effectiveness of active mediation in mitigating various negative outcomes from children, evidence indicates that parents rarely engage in this kind of beneficial behavior (Austin, Bolls, Fujioka, & Engelbertson, 1999; Corder-Bolz, 1980). This urges mediation scholars to encourage more parental active mediation. However, it is not enough to only inform parents about the advantages of active mediation. Instead, it is more meaningful if mediation research can inform and empower parents through identifying effective mediation messages.

Sharing this understanding, Nathanson and colleagues have identified several effective mediation strategies over the past years (Nathanson, 2004; Nathanson & Cantor, 2000; Nathanson & Yang, 2003). Most importantly, they pointed out that since mediation research is not couched within any overarching theoretical framework, it is crucial for studies to examine the effectiveness of mediation messages with theoretical perspectives. They further argued that theoretically derived mediation messages allow research to identify effective mediations and provide explanations for the processes underlying these effective mediations.

In Nathanson’s own words, “researchers studying active mediation should turn to the literature documenting the effects of the content in question, identify the elements that contribute to the effect, and develop active mediation strategies that modify these elements” (Nathanson et al., 2002, P. 924). Basically, this is saying that theories explaining how violent programs influence children can serve as frameworks for research on mediation.

For example, reviewing existing research on violent media and its influence on children’s aggression, theories such as social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986;
Bandura, 1991), attribution theory, and moral evaluation (Rule & Ferguson, 1986), and literatures on identification (Huesmann et al., 1983; Maccoby & Wilson, 1957), perceived realism (Huston et al., 1995; Huesmann et al., 1983), and fictional involvement (Nathanson & Cantor, 2000; Tamborini, Stiff, & Heidel, 1990) have all identified various cognitive elements as contributors to media’s negative effect. They inform us of elements leading to violent outcomes under violence viewing and, as suggested by Nathanson et al. (2002), have the potential to allow the design of theoretically informed and effective mediation messages to mitigate media violence’s negative effect on children.

Despite the existence of these various theories and literatures, only perceived realism and fictional involvement have been used in mediation research (Nathanson & Cantor, 2000; Nathanson & Yang, 2003). As surprising as it may seem, theories such as social learning/cognitive theory which has its long history in explaining media’s effect on aggression still awaits further explication and examination in the mediation literature. The same thing holds true for the cognitive approach of moral developmental theories which recently were used to understand televised violence’s effect on children’s moral reasoning (Kremar & Valkenberg, 1999).

As a result, this paper argues the need of a convergence of social learning and moral developmental approaches for the understanding of morality in children’s response to violent TV. This paper will first review social learning/cognitive theory as one overarching theoretical framework in understanding mediation’s effect, especially from a moral justification perspective. Since observational learning models and models that emphasize standard of conduct (Bandura, 1986) are considered key component to this theory, their relation with mediation effect will be reviewed first. Then, a special emphasis will be put on the concept of “standard of conduct” (also
labeled as “moral standards”) and a less discussed concept --- moral thought and reasoning (i.e. moral justification). Moral justification is conceptualized by Bandura (1986) in the social learning theory as a judgmental process that cognitively governs each individual’s self-regulation. In the case of violent effects, it is the mechanism that regulates or disengages violent behavior. Therefore, in order to better understand its functions within the context of media, studies regarding justified violence’s effect on aggression and children’s moral judgment of media violence will be reviewed as well.

After the discussion on moral justification, the importance of using moral developmental theories (e.g., Piaget, 1965; Kohlberg, 1984) as another conceptual framework to understand mediation’s effectiveness will be covered. While Bandura’s social cognitive theory posits the bidirectional interaction between personal factors, behavioral patterns and environmental events, moral developmental theories emphasizes the importance of social environments in children’s internal construction of their social world. In the case of understanding mediation, this approach provides lenses to see how moral reasoning of TV violence function within children of different ages. Consequently, it will be argued that moral developmental theories can help understanding the process underlying mediation on violent TV in a moral sense.

More specifically, it will be argued that moral developmental theory can account for children’s developmental differences in response to the importance of examining mediation from a moral perspective (will be conceptualized as “moral mediation”). The importance of examining mediation sensitive to children’s moral reasoning will be stressed along with an extant review of mediation research on violent TV. Subsequently, a study incorporating Bandura’s social cognitive theory (1991) and the cognitive approach of moral development as the overarching
frameworks to examine mediation will be presented. All together, the present study exists at the intersection of social learning/ cognitive theory and childhood moral developmental theory to better understand the effectiveness of a form of mediation: moral mediation.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Learning/Cognitive Theory

The most notable theory in explaining the relationship between media violence and children’s aggression is social learning/cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986, 2001). However, social cognitive theory is a broad theory of human self and society that may be applied to mediation as well. It posits that “personal factors in the form of cognitive, affective, and biological events, behavioral patterns, and environmental events all operate as interacting determinants that influence each other bidirectionally” (Bandura, 2001, p.266). In other words, it emphasizes triadic reciprocal causation among individuals, their environment, and their behavior (Figure 1).

![Diagram of triadic reciprocal causation](image)

Figure 1: Schematization of triadic reciprocal causation in the casual model of social cognitive theory (Bandura, 2001, p. 266).
In the case of mediation, socializing agents such as parents or TV act as the environmental determinants that interact with children’s personal determinants such as cognition. Depending on the exposure of either violent programs or parental mediation, children will develop schemas about violence seen on TV. These schemas may then be used to further guide their attention to later televised violence, determine their judgment towards the violence, affect their retention to violent models, and even act as inhibition or incentives in determining future actions. Since the interest of this paper is to explore the effectiveness of mediation, more emphasis will be given to the bidirectional relationship between the personal determinants and the environmental determinants within Bandura’s schematization of triadic reciprocal causation.

According to Bandura (2001), environmental factors influence behaviors through personal factors such as cognitive processes. For example, he contends that observational learning is motivated and regulated through two cognitive processes. One process focuses on the response-outcome expectation that says observational learning is more likely when the consequences of an observed behavior are rewarded rather than punished. That is, response-outcome expectations govern observational learning. Another process focuses on how moral standards\(^1\) regulate which observationally-learned activities to pursue. That is, observational learning is governed through moral standards.

From the perspective of response-outcome expectation process, television is seen as the source that provides models that demonstrate aggressive values, patterns of thoughts, and behaviors for observational learning. Given television portrayals of reward or lack of punishment toward violence, observational learning is likely to be motivated. This then leads to imitation of violence (Bandura et al., 1961; Bandura, 1991 2001).

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\(^1\) Moral standard and standard of conduct had been used interchangeably in Bandura’s work (Bandura, 1991 2001).
The observed reward experienced by others serves as positive incentives to motivate imitation. At an attitudinal level, these incentives communicate an approval for violence which children can be motivated to adopt (Wilson et al., 2002). For example, seeing characters triumph over evil using aggression sends children the message that violence is being rewarded. Consequently, children are motivated and encouraged to imitate the behavior or learn the attitude.

Given that the reward for televised violence functions as an incentive for violence learning, the cognitive element contributing to the media effect is the outcome expectation. When the outcome expectation is positive, children are motivated to imitate and when the outcome expectation is negative, violence imitation can be inhibited. With this in mind, altering children’s outcome expectation during violence viewing can reduce their violence learning. That is, if children’s perceptions towards the positive outcome of televised violence were changed, violence learning or imitation can be avoided and this is where mediation comes in. In fact, a recent review of intervention strategies for reducing media induced violence suggested social cognitive theory as a framework in understanding mediation’s effectiveness (Cantor & Wilson, 2003). Though the connection was made, not much has being delineated besides that mediation, especially negative mediation that comments analytically or disapprovingly, “may function to alter children’s perceptions of the reward or punishment contingencies associated with the behavior and thereby affect children’s subsequent imitative behavior” (Cantor & Wilson, 2003, p.369).

Reward contingencies associated with children’s violent behavior have been identified ranging from tangible rewards (e.g., desired objects) to psychological benefits (e.g., control over others) and social reactions (e.g., status among peers) (Guerra, Nucci, & Huesmann, 1994). Accordingly, mediation commenting on the
reward or punishment consequences of any televised aggression should influence children’s observational learning from television. As a matter of fact, mediation messages tested so far, whether it is negative comments on the morality of the behavior (Hicks, 1968), the acceptability of the character (Nathanson, 2004), or the reality of the plot (Nathanson & Yang, 2003), have been reported to decrease children’s orientation towards televised aggression. This further suggests reward consequences to be the cognitive mechanism affecting children’s orientation towards violence. For example, by commenting on the acceptability of the character, social cognitive theory suggests that it’s the negative social reaction that is being mediated. Hence, it is the negative social reaction that refrained children from engaging in observational learning. All in all, social learning/cognitive theory’s outcome expectation model explains how mediation might process under violent content.

While it is important that research is recognizing social learning/cognitive theory’s relation with mediation, there’s more to it than just the outcome expectation model. As discussed by Guerra et al. (1994), children’s development of aggressive behavior and attitude entails not only the development of general social cognition in maintenance of aggressive behavior, but also of a more specific cognition—moral cognition². They criticized that studies on children’s development of aggressive behaviors are lacking emphasis on understanding cognition and aggression in a moral sense. Similarly, as noted by Arsenio and Lemerise (2001), “most current research on cognitive mediators of aggression…avoids moral concepts” (p.64). These same criticisms can be applied to mediation studies on violent TV.

While social learning/cognitive theory provides a framework in understanding the relationship between media violence, children’s aggression, and mediation, most

¹⁰⁹⁹² Moral cognition is referring specifically to “judgments about moral issues (e.g., issues of harm and fairness)” (p.14) rather than nonmoral issues such as mathematics. Guerra, et al., 1994).
of the studies using this perspective examined the cognition of reward and punishment in relation to observational learning of televised violent behaviors but not the morality that regulates the behaviors. Studies also suggest that people’s perception of the moral rectitude of an aggressive act can influence their support for violence retaliation (Rule & Duker, 1973). This again suggests that moral evaluations are related with aggressive acts.

By no means is this suggesting social learning/cognitive theory’s inadequacy to explain children’s cognition in relation to televised violence and violent behavior in a “moral” sense. In fact, social cognitive theory provides us a well delineated model to examine learning of televised violence and mediation from a moral perspective. As mentioned earlier, observational learning is suggested by the theory to be governed through two cognitive processes with outcome expectation being one and moral standard being the other. With Bandura’s (1991) model of moral standard, this study wishes to connect the function of mediation with morality and argue for the importance to examine mediation in a moral sense.

According to Bandura (1991), behaviors can be regulated through the activation of moral standards. Included in this process are important concepts such as moral standards, social sanctions, self sanctions, disengagement mechanism, and moral justification. First, these concepts will be defined and explained. Second, they will be applied in the context of mediation as a model to further explore the process underlying mediation, especially from a moral perspective.

Under the topic of children’s development of aggression, moral standard can be understood as the “normative standards of acceptable conduct” (Guerra et al., 1994, p.18). In other words, learning of aggressive behavior is governed by the belief of the acceptability of aggression. Social cognitive theory contends that this acceptability of
aggression forms and accumulates from sources such as parents, other adults, peers, and symbolic models (e.g., television). These sources act as social sanctions through which moral standards are presented. In his work on social cognitive theory of morality, Bandura stated that parental social sanctions that disapprove transgressive behaviors and commend valued conduct add substance to moral standards (Bandura, 1991); however, symbolic social sanction such as television can alter moral standards through justifying, glamorizing, and trivializing human violence (Bandura, 2001).

With both parents and television being the possible source of social sanction, this is suggesting that while television’s portrayal of a superhero triumphing over evil with violence can weaken children’s restraints over aggressive behaviors, parental influence can stop this from happening. In fact, though parents are not the sole source of social sanction, they are the most influential one (Bandura, 1991). Accordingly, mediation messages, especially parental mediation should mitigate negative influence of televised violence through reinforcing or demonstration of moral standard.

Study results suggest that with development, aggressive behavior is increasingly governed by standards of acceptable conduct (Guerra et al., 1994). Guerra et al. (1994) reviewed that while adolescents’ aggression were found to correlate positively with their belief that aggression is acceptable across different situations, younger children’s aggression showed relatively weaker relations. One possible implication from this result could be that younger children are still in the process of forming standards of acceptable conduct. As a result, they don’t have internalized moral standards for them to judge aggression from. Consequently, younger children demonstrated a weaker link between standard and behavior. In other words, younger children are developing their standard for the acceptable conduct as they progress from children to adolescents.
A further implication for mediation research is that, on the one hand, negative mediation messages can help children in the internalization of their moral standards. On the other hand, since children don’t have a fully developed standard to guide their behavior, mediation can serve as reinforcement of moral standards. That is, social cognitive theory suggests that social sanctions can formulate children’s moral standards in the long run, and can serve as a motivator through which undesirable behaviors are inhibited or disinhibited in the short run. As children develop, parents not only can reinforce moral standards through the form of social sanction but also help them to internalize moral standards as guides for self sanctions.

Bandura further discussed that moral standards are best internalized when social sanctions are accompanied by reasoning (Bandura, 1991). The importance of reasoning will be discussed in the second half of this paper. Once moral standards are internalized, children no longer need the presence of parents as social sanctions to guide their behavior. With the increase in children’s age and accumulated exposure to various sources of social sanctions, sanctions that govern behaviors switch from social to a personal locus. This change of locus introduces the concept of self sanction in the social cognitive theory.

Even though self sanctions allow children to inhibit or disinhibit aggressive behaviors with the use of their internalized moral standards, without activation, moral standards would not function to motivate or regulate behaviors. That is, although moral standards are used as guides for behaviors, they do not function as fixed regulators of behaviors. This is especially true when children are still in the process of internalizing moral standards. According to Bandura (2001), there are various mechanisms that disengage self sanctions from activating internalized moral standards. Consequently, though with the same set of moral standards, different mechanisms of
disengagement will result in different types of behavior. Interestingly, Bandura (1991) reviewed that these mechanisms of moral disengagement has been examined most extensively in the expression of violence. Among the mechanisms identified, moral justification, a form of cognitive restructuring of behavior, is “the most effective psychological mechanism for promoting transgressive conducts” (Bandura, 2001, p.278). Subsequently, for the purpose of understanding mediation in a moral sense, this further supports the importance of applying these concepts in understanding the effectiveness of mediation in mitigating television’s effect on children’s orientation to violence.

Applying Bandura’s (1991) moral standard model and the concept of moral justification to the context of violence viewing is to say that although children may have internalized the moral standard that violence is wrong, through television’s justification of violence, observational learning of aggression is encouraged and internalized moral standards are overwritten. As a result, children form a positive orientation towards violence or even engage in violence imitation.

This logic can be further supported by studies on media effects of justified violence on aggression (Hoyt, 1970). Participants show higher tendency for aggression when violence was viewed as justified. Furthermore, the National Television Violence study (Wilson et al., 1997) summarized research on effects of television violence and reported that justification of a violent act was found to be among the strongest mediating factors predicting viewers’ tendency to act aggressively. In fact, a meta-analysis of over 200 studies concluded that television violence has a stronger effect on aggression when it is depicted as justified (Paik & Comstock, 1994). Studies also found that justified violence can lower viewers’ perceptions of the seriousness of violence. Adults viewing justified violence
perceived violence to be less extreme than adults viewing unjustified violence (Moore & Tracey, 1996). To sum up, research suggests that perceived justification of violence can enhance disinhibition effects that increase the probability of aggressive behaviors (Berkowitz & Powers, 1979; Jo & Berkowitz, 1994).

Studies on children also found moral justification to weaken their constraints from aggressive orientation. Krcmar and Valkenburg (1999) reported that children judged justified violence portrayed in stories to be less wrong than unjustified violence. Obviously, moral justification provides children a moral standard that accepts violence as a means of solution. As Krcmar and Curtis (2003) explained, justified violence on TV “activated more permissive moral judgments” (p.471). Such a phenomenon exists cross-culturally as well. Vidal et al. (2003) reported that socially justified violence on TV was not considered violent by 13 year-old children in Spain. Again, this demonstrates that children tend to disengage their self sanctions toward violent behaviors when provided with moral justifications on screen. In fact, it is with such belief that content analysis research felt the need to identify “justification” of violence as a contextual factor that enhances disinhibition effects (Gunter, 1985; NTVS, 1998). Justification is defined as violence portrayed to be “morally correct,” “right,” or “just” and nearly 30% of violent acts in children’s programming are depicted as justified or morally correct (Wilson et al., 2002).

These research results suggested that exposure to televised justification of violence does not activate children’s moral standards. Justified violence sends across a moral message to children that violence is right and morally correct. Once violence is perceived by children as justified, this moral reasoning serves as a mechanism to disengage children from moral conducts and increase children’s willingness to use aggression. As mentioned earlier, altering children’s cognition towards the
consequences of observed behaviors through mediation is predicted by social
cognitive theory to disinhibit children’s aggression. The same theory also suggests
that moral justification is another cognitive mechanism functioning behind
observational learning. As a result, it is likely that by altering children’s moral
reasoning of televised violence through mediation can lead to inhibition of aggression
or aggressive thoughts. Following Nathanson et al.’s (2002) suggestion to “identify
the elements that contribute to the effect, and develop active mediation strategies that
modify these elements” (p.924), this study argues the importance of designing
mediation messages that are directed at altering children’s moral reasoning of the
justification of violence. Focusing on the moral perspective of mediation not only can
add to the richness of mediation research but also empower parents with effective
mediation strategies.

Under the context of television mediation, messages delivered by adults serve
as social sanctions to regulate aggression possibly elicited through symbolic modeling
of televised violence. Since mediation’s nature is to instruct and evaluate the violence
seen on TV (Messaris, 1982), messages that address the moral justification of
televised violence serve as the source for social sanction that internalizes children’s
moral standards in the long run, and cognitively restructure children’s perceptions of
justified television violence in the short run. In short, children acquire moral standards
through observing the moral responses delivered by adults. This argument established
the preliminary theoretical framework for this study. Furthermore, this study seeks to
examine mediation’s effect through the perspective of moral reasoning; especially
morality in terms of children’s perceived moral justification (Figure 2).
Children’s Moral Reasoning: Perceived Justified TV Violence

Adult Mediation: Altered TV Moral Justification

Disinhibition: Willingness to use Aggression

Figure 2: Relationship between Moral Reasoning, Mediation, and Disinhibition

If altering children’s perceived justification of televised violence can influence their willingness to use aggression, how do children interpret televised violence to reach the conclusion that it is justified? That is, what is their justification process? Furthermore, through what mechanism can parents alter children’s perceived justification of violence in reaching the ultimate mediation goal?

Unfortunately, while social cognitive theory suggests moral justification as a possible mechanism behind violent media’s effect on children, it does not provide an extensive understanding on how this moral cognition governs children’s observational learning. On the other hand, Bandura did mention that moral justification disengages moral conduct by providing reasons for violence. That is, people would not engage in immoral conduct without reasons to do so. They justify their aggressive behaviors and attitudes based on “reasons for violence”.

This implies that “reasons for violence” are one important concept necessary to understand the judgmental process of violence considered justified. If televised violence provides viewers with reasons for violence, the moral justification mechanism is more likely to be triggered, thereby leading to the disengagement of moral conduct and disinhibition of aggression. Besides social cognitive theory,
scholars using attribution theory also confirm that perceived cause or the reason for behaving violently contributes to the extent to which aggression will be inhibited (Ferguson & Rule, 1986).

Empirical evidence from research looking at the effects of justified and unjustified violence on aggression further illustrates the importance of “reasons for violence” as one important concept to better understand moral justification of violence. Experimental designs done to measure justified violence’s effect on viewers oftentimes operationalize justified and unjustified violence by the presence and absence of “reasons for violence” and found consistent results that violence with a reason (justified violence) leads to higher aggression or willingness to engage in violence than violence without a reason (Berkowitz & Powers, 1979; Krcmar & Valkenburg, 1999).

In their study, Krcmar and Valkenburg (1999) designed stories depicting violence to assess children’s moral interpretation of justified and unjustified violence. Violence committed with motive or reason such as restitution for harm or protection of another person was used as justified violence and was indeed perceived by children as justified. As for the unjustified violence, violence committed without a known reason was used and was indeed perceived to be unjustified. Similar to Krcmar and Valkenburg’s (1999) study, Hoyt (1970) and Berkowitz and Powers (1979) included films portraying violence due to vengeance and self-defense as conditions for justified violence. As for the unjustified condition, they told their participants that the perpetrator has no reason to act violently. Again, they found higher aggression in the justified condition, except their participants were adults.

While these studies demonstrated that “reason for violence” contribute to people’s decision of whether a violent act is right or wrong, according to Krcmar and
Cooke (2001), they did not examine the judgmental process. Viewers’ individual interpretations of the violence and the reasons involved were not taken into consideration. That is, little is informed about the process of moral justification depending on different reasons for violence. The studies assume reasons such as self-defense and vengeance to be at the same level of justification yet there are studies suggesting that different reasons for violence elicit different degrees of justification for violence. In other words, not only does the existence of “reasons for violence” influence justification of violence, certain reasons for violence would be perceived to be more justified over another.

According to the NTVS (1998), there are six most frequently used reasons for televised violence. They are protection of life, anger, retaliation, personal gain, and mental instability. Though no study to date has examined how these reasons portrayed on TV influence people’s perception of justified violence, other studies have pointed out that defensive or altruistic aggression on TV may be interpreted as milder than offensive, intentional, or sadistic aggression (Gunter, 1985). Some even argue that not all aggression is undesirable. Aggression such as the capacity to defend oneself is perceived to be essential to survival (Simpson, 2004). Several studies on interpersonal aggression have found consistent results with this same conjecture. They found that prosocially motivated aggression was rated more morally right than aggression with hostile reasons (Rule, Nesdale, & McAra, 1974). For example, when a father shoots someone who is trying to hurt his child, the violence would seem more justified than when a burglar shoots at a person for witnessing the crime. The prevalence of a hero using violence to punish a villain’s evil act on TV is another example of justified violence that involves a range of reasons for violence. A hero can engage in violence
for reasons ranging from life protection (i.e., to save the world), to anger and to retaliation.

Overall, these studies suggest that there are degrees of justification, depending on each individual’s moral philosophy and reasoning. For example, judging from an reciprocity philosophy, vengeance may be seen as more justified than prosocial aggression (Rule & Ferguson, p.36). Consequently, different reasons for violence elicit different degrees of perceived justification and this perceived justification in turn affects the extent to which aggression is inhibited. Unfortunately, the majority of these studies were conducted with adult participants. As of yet, we know little about whether and how these ideas translate to children.

Importance of Developmental Differences

If theories and studies suggest that perceived reasons for behaving violently determine the justification of violent behavior, does this apply to people of all age groups? How do children process reasons for violence? Do they use it as a factor to interpret whether a violent act is justified or do they use factors other than reasons for violence? More specifically, do they possess the ability to morally judge the reasons for violence? What factors influence children’s moral reasoning about the justification of televised violence?

As the importance of understanding mediation from a moral perspective has already been established earlier, by answering the questions mentioned above, mediation research can design more effective morally related mediation messages that are age-appropriate to control violent TV’s effect on children’s aggression. In fact, a recent study found that not all children judge violence to be justified based on perceived reasons for violence (Krcmar & Cooke, 2001). Drawing from children’s moral developmental theories, it was suggested that younger children reason
differently from older children. With their limited cognitive development, younger children’s judgments tend to focus on authority rules and tangible consequences. Putting in the context of moral justification for televised violence, Krcmar et al. (2001) found that younger children judge justified violence according to perceived punishment more so than perceived reasons for violence. This suggests the importance to acknowledge children’s moral developmental differences when examining their perceived justification of violence.

Media effects studies on children have long agreed that children’s cognitive developmental changes have a significant impact on their learning of aggressive thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors (Smith & Donnerstein, 1998). This extends to mediation research as well. In fact, one of the trends in mediation research is to address developmental comparison of mediation’s effects (Nathanson, 2004). Though recently identified, traces of developmental differences in response to mediation messages were already found in earlier mediation experiments (Corder-Bolz, 1980; Grusec, 1973). These earlier studies on adult criticism of media violence found that adult criticisms reduced more of older children’s imitation and pro-violence attitude than that of the younger children. Interestingly, these studies used mediation messages that addressed the right and wrong of a televised violent act. This not only further supports the importance of age difference in mediation research, but also the importance of age difference in response to mediation messages that particularly address moral values.

Over the past few years, developmental differences have become even more evident in studies exploring mediation strategies (Nathanson, 2004; Nathanson & Yang, 2003). As a result, this beckons for a theoretical framework that both addresses
the (1) moral form of children’s cognition and (2) the developmental differences to better understand mediation’s effect on mitigating violent TV’s negative effects.

In terms of the social learning/cognitive theory, children’s development of moral reasoning is said to be influenced by various environmental factors such as adults (Brody & Henderson, 1977; Walker, Hennig, & Krettenauer, 2000), peers (Ruffy, 1981), and television (Krcmar & Valkenberg, 1999). Basically, this perspective argues that children learn to make moral judgments and reasoning by watching a model’s demonstration. In terms of the immediate environment, parents serve as models, and in a symbolic environment, TV characters are the models.

The same theory also suggests that moral justification can activate moral standards to govern moral conducts. It is implied that mediation addressing moral justification can function as a mechanism to inhibit children’s violent behaviors. Furthermore, the same theory also mentioned the importance of reasons for violence in relation to moral justification. Nonetheless, this theory is not sensitive to children’s cognitive developmental differences in processing moral justifications of violent behaviors. Given the significance of children’s developmental differences in mediation studies and perceived justification studies, the next step is to turn to moral developmental theories for predictions of how children differ in their moral justification of violence and to inform the design of mediation messages that address moral justification. Theoretically, mediation messages on moral justification should be structured according to children’s moral developmental differences.

*Moral Developmental Theories*

In order to understand how children interpret reasons for violence and the justification of violence, it is important to turn to the cognitive approach of moral development. This is further supported by Gibbs’ (2003) interpretation of morality in
cognitive developmental approach. He said that, “morality in the
cognitive-developmental approach refers mainly to the moral judgment (or cognitive
evaluation and justification) of the prescriptive values of right and wrong” (p.16).
Clearly, this approach can provide a better understanding of how children use reasons
to interpret and justify violence seen on TV.

When it comes to the cognitive approach of moral development, Piaget (1965)
and Kohlberg’s (1984) theories play a huge role. Both of them are deeply rooted in
the constructivist viewpoint, which draws a clear distinction with Bandura’s social
cognitive theory on morality. The constructivist approach focuses on how internal
constructions are established and developed through the course of childhood
development. More specifically, moral developmental theories focus on children’s
self-construction of moral standards and judgments. As for social cognitive theory, it
focuses mainly on children’s imitation and internalization of moral standards and
moral judgments.

As reviewed by Gibbs (2003), Kohlberg posits that achieving moral maturity
is not about socializing or internalizing norms. Rather, it’s about individuals
constructing a logical ideal through exchanges of perspectives with others.
Consequently, moral developmental theories argues that children are active agents
who construct moral standards and judgments through cognitive processes as opposed
to passive individuals who internalize moral standards and judgments handed down
by socializing agents. To construct actively means the attempt to actively organize
social experiences (Turiel, 1973). According to Guerra et al., (1994), the cognitive
approach of moral development posits that moral conduct cannot be understood
independently of the actor’s thoughts and reasoning about that action. This means that
in a violent TV viewing context, a child viewer’s aggressive outcome cannot be understood without his or her reasoning and thinking of the viewed violence.

In order to synthesize the important findings of moral developmental theories, this paper will first review Piaget’s moral phases (1965) and then segue into the qualitative differences between Kohlberg’s (1984) proposed moral developmental stages. Finally, a recently revised version of Kohlberg’s moral stages (Gibbs, 2003) will be discussed for the purpose of clarifying a more accurate interpretation of the stage-related age trend toward moral development.

It is hoped that by discussing the shared underlying theme in these moral developmental theories, the theoretical framework of understanding mediation’s effectiveness in a moral sense will be strengthened. In short, the goal is to use the perspectives of moral developmental theories to explicate how children interpret and reason internally for justified violence on TV.

Piaget’s theory of moral development. Piaget (1965) identified two concepts of morality, heteronomous and autonomous, in his classic study on children’s developing moral judgment. He found that when asked to reason for their moral judgments on transgressions, children process differently according to their cognitive developmental differences. For younger children, they use the heteronomous morality of reasoning. Using this type of reasoning, children are more inclined to judge transgressions using rules handed down by authority figure; hence the “heteronomous” term used to refer to rules of “others”. Characteristics such as egocentrism, rigidity of the rules, and objective responsibility mark this type of reasoning (Ruffy, 1981).

By egocentrism, it is referring to children being caught up with their own point of view and not being able to view from other people’s perspective. In this case, right
and wrong are considered from the child’s perspective rather than other people’s perspective. Consequently, though children using heteronomous morality can tell you that hitting other people is “always wrong”, they will also engage in the exact behavior when situation calls for it. Piaget (1965) attributed this phenomenon to the fact that children are yet to have true understanding of why wrong is judged wrong. Heteronomous morality also views rules given by adult as something that can’t be changed (Ruffy, 1981). Everything is either totally right or totally wrong. Furthermore, children especially refer to rules from highly salient adults (Gibbs, 1995). For example, when asked why violence is wrong, children would say because their teacher or their parents say so.

Children making moral judgment using heteronomous morality also process through objective responsibility which leads them to judge an action according to its consequences (Piaget, 1965; Ruffy, 1981). According to moral reasoning studies, children below the age of 7 or 8 evaluate acts with an emphasis on the consequences rather than the intention underlying it (Eisenberg & Mussen, 1989).

Studies using Piaget’s theory on moral development in understanding children’s judgment of aggressive acts have found this characteristic to hold true. Rule and Duker (1973) found that when judging aggressive acts heard through stories, younger children (8-years-old) rely more on consequences than older children (12-years-old). Piaget also described that through increased interaction with peers, heteronomous moral reasoning gives way to autonomous moral reasoning\(^3\). By then, children began to take other people’s circumstances into account. This age trend was found to hold true even under judgment of aggression in media context (Krcmar & Cooke, 2001). If children use the same moral reasoning in the context of media, this

\(^3\) Though Piaget focuses on the importance of peer interaction for moral maturity, other research have found that parent-child interaction does enhance moral reasoning development (Walker & Taylor, 1991; Walker et al., 2000).
implies that not every child focuses on reasons for violence or character’s intention when evaluating televised violence.

Within autonomous morality, children gradually develop understanding for justice and fairness. First, they construct a sense of fairness through “you scratch my back I scratch yours” or “tit-for-tat” morality. Although this notion bears the idea of equality and fairness, Piaget (1965) argued that it has not reached a mature form of morality until the emergence of a more mature notion of justice. That is, normally by late childhood, children would progress from the “tit-for-tat” morality to the “do as you would be done by” morality. By then, true autonomous morality is established. These two notions are best expressed by Piaget’s (1965) term as “reciprocity as a fact” and “reciprocity as an ideal” (p.323). The characteristics for autonomous morality are reciprocity, modifiable rule, and subjective responsibility (Ruffy, 1981).

Developed from heteronomous morality, older children now have the ability to take other people’s perspective and judge right and wrong by taking other people’s perspectives and intentions into consideration. Interestingly, a recent study found perspective taking to mediate children’s moral reasoning about justified violence seen in fantasy TV violence (Krcmar & Vieira, 2005). This not only marks the importance of perspective taking in children’s moral reasoning, but also underscores the significance of examining children’s moral reasoning of violent TV.

Though Piaget identified such a developmental progression of moral development from heteronomous to tit-for-tat and to ideal reciprocity, he was hesitant to call them stages because of the overlapping of heteronomous and autonomous reasoning from his interview with children (Gibbs, 1995). Hence, he viewed the trend as fluid, overlapping phases as opposed to invariant sequential stages.
Contrasting to Piaget’s conservative approach on the developmental phases but building on top of his constructive viewpoint, Kohlberg (1984) was daring enough to establish moral developmental stages that he identified as invariant in sequence and different qualitatively by stage. He argued that as each individual matures, they go through stages of development that move them towards “moral adequacy” (Kohlberg, 1971, p.213; cf. Gibbs, 1991) or moral maturity. While Piaget used stories depicting children’s transgression such as breaking glasses, Kohlberg used moral dilemma such as one that pits the moral judgment of stealing against saving a dying person to understand children’s moral reasoning.

Through both longitudinal and cross-sectional data, Kohlberg (1984) found that individuals’ moral reasoning tend to pass through several stages in order. Various studies looking at moral reasoning circumstances other than transgressions, such as distributive justice or obedience and authority, also found similar age trend (Damon, 1977). In Gibbs’ (2003) own words, these moral judgment stages are structures of “moral justifications of reasons supporting a decision or evaluation in the context of the right and the good” (p.49). Again, this description demonstrated the conceptual link between Kohlberg’s moral developmental stages and children’s moral justification process on media violence.

As mentioned earlier, Kohlberg (1984) developed his stage theory with a strong influence of Piaget’s viewpoint. Consequently, they share many concepts in common. There are basically three moral levels (preconventional, conventional and post conventional) in Kohlberg’s moral developmental theory. His six famous stages of moral development are grouped into these three levels with two stages in each level. According to Kohlberg (1984), the term “conventional” means conforming to and
upholding the rules and conventions of society or authority simply for the sake of them being the society’s rules or conventions. For children at the preconventional level, they are not yet ready to understand and uphold these conventions and rules. As for people at post conventional level, they understand and accept the conventions and rules but the acceptance is based on accepting the underlying moral principle of the conventions and rules. That is, they judge by the underlying moral principle as opposed to the convention.

Preconventional level consists of Stage-1 and Stage-2 of moral development. Stage-1 is labeled as “punishment and obedience” (Kohlberg, 1984). As characterized by its label, a preconventional child views rules and expectations as something given down by an external authority. They see rules and conventions as something external to themselves. When asked to make a moral evaluation, right is obedience to rules and authority, avoiding punishment, and not doing physical harm. It is described that children of this stage are limited with ability to consider multiple dimensions and to keep track of multiple sources of information.

To put in a simple term, children of this stage (from about 2 to 7\textsuperscript{4}) are egocentric (Selman, 1971). That is, they don’t consider the interests of others nor do they differentiate the difference between self and others. Their judgments tend to follow events that are most immediate and most salient to them. Since perceptual and physicalistic features are usually more salient to the self, young children understand the world and reason according to those salient features. Consequently, actions are judged according to physical consequences rather than the psychological interests of others.

\textsuperscript{4} This age range is provided for reference. One must not take it too literally as studies have shown a range of age fluctuation in children’s use of egocentrism as well as perspective taking for reasoning depending on the task children were given with (Maccoby, 1980).
For example, children of this stage would say it’s not right to steal because the authority figure says so or because they will get punished if they do. To them, behaviors that end in punishment are considered bad, and those that end in rewards are considered good. Considering characteristics such as focus on authority figure and salient features, Kohlberg’s stage-1 moral reasoning resembles Piaget’s heteronomous morality.

Even when children were presented with interpersonal violence more similar to violence seen on TV, their reasoning pattern still resonates with the characteristics of Kohlberg’s stage-1 moral reasoning. Children demonstrated this “punishment and obedience” level of reasoning by arguing that violence is wrong because “you could get yourself arrested” or “you shouldn’t kick” (Krcmar & Valkenburg, 1999, p. 621). This demonstrated that when presented with stories reflecting that of media violence, some children still use stage-1 reasoning with the emphasis on avoiding punishment and referring to rigid rules. Since many television programs depict violence without showing consequences and punishments (Wilson et al., 2002), children of this stage have no salient features to base their judgment on. As a matter of fact, heavy viewing of fantasy violence was found to encourage young children to remain in this stage of egocentrism through the emphasis of perpetrator’s perspective (Krcmar & Vieira, 2005). These findings make this paper’s emphasis on mediation from moral reasoning perspective even more necessary and meaningful.

The major difference between Stage-1 and Stage-2 is the awareness of fairness or reciprocity within a child. While Stage-1 defines rules in terms of authority status or physical amount of punishment, Stage-2 defines by equality or reciprocity. Similar to Piaget’s “reciprocity as fact”, Kohlberg’s stage-2 (individual instrumental purpose
and exchange) describes how children reason fairness according to pragmatic or instrumental exchange.

This level of reasoning defines right as following rules that will yield one’s own interest and that is fair. For example, a child might say it is important to keep a promise because only by doing so will other people keep their promises to you. Although by this stage, children have moved from superficial physicalistic features to understanding of reciprocity, such reciprocity is not yet the ideal and mature reciprocity required for adequate morality. As Kohlberg (1984) puts it, positively, it prescribes acts of reciprocity conceived as the equal exchanges of favors or acts of cooperation. However, negatively, it deems right for selfish acts of an inappropriate extension of individual exchange. For example, Kohlberg’s subjects in Stage-2 often say that one should steal a drug to save a friend’s life because “you may need him to do the same for you someday” (Kohlberg, 1984).

In an interpersonal aggression context, a possible reasoning of this stage can be demonstrated through a quote from Piaget’s work. “If somebody punches you in the arm three times, you should punch them back three times---no more, no less” (Piaget, 1965, p.139). Stage-2 moral reasoning resonates with Piaget’s “tit-for-tat” morality of reasoning.

Similar to how media violence might prolong stage-1’s immature moral reasoning, given how violence is portrayed on TV, it can just as well prolong stage-2 moral reasoning. A close look at depiction of violence on TV, justified violence is quite ubiquitous (Wilson et al., 2002). Unfortunately, Stage-2 reasoning coincides with the justified violence frequently seen on children’s violent TV shows. Justified violence has often been conceptualized as the restitution for harm or action of revenge (Krcmar & Valkenburg, 1999; Krcmar & Vieira, 2005). Obviously, it reflects the
concept of “tit-for-tat” morality. Given that, media’s portrayal of violence provides models or simply encourages preconventional level of moral reasoning. This concern further underscores the necessity for mediation that addresses these moral judgments as intervention.

A preconventional person does not identify with the convention but their emphasis in response to moral dilemmas is individualistic and focuses on avoiding punishment. By Stage-3, which enters into the conventional level, children begin to develop the ability to take the perspective of others. By approximately age 9 (Walker, 1980), children’s moral judgment shifts from understanding of pragmatic reciprocity to mutual trust in a relationship. Therefore, reciprocity goes beyond self-interest and pragmatic exchanges to being aware of other people’s expectations and feelings. This coincides with Piaget’s “reciprocity as ideal” and speaks directly to sociomoral order maintained between dyadic relationships that require mutual role taking.

Children begin to demonstrate the ability to consider others’ psychological factors such as feelings and thoughts. Consequently, morality or being right is motivated by the concern and sensitivity to other people’s feelings and thoughts such as motives or reasoning for behaviors. At this point, behavior is judged by intention for the first time. Explanation for violence given by children of this stage would be reasons such as “he means well” (Turiel, 1973) and “he probably didn’t mean it” (Krcmar & Valkenburg, 1999).

According to Kohlberg (1984), the downside of Stage-3 is that it practices ideal reciprocity under close interpersonal contexts such as family or close friends. Children at this stage only take the roles of those they have close ties with; therefore, they base many of their judgments toward other people such as TV characters on a stock of stereotypes such as who is nice and who is mean. In other words, children
can easily conform to stereotypical images of what is the majority or “natural” behavior (Turiel, 1973). Such a stereotypical view might bring biased reasoning without impartial judgment.

Applying this stage’s characteristics unto children’s moral judgment of televised violence, heroes and villains have the most stereotypical image of right versus wrong and good versus right. Consequently, this explains how children in stage-3, though advanced in awareness of people’s intentions, are still likely to view heroes who engage in violent behaviors to be natural and acceptable. Thus lead to biased reasoning that violence is the right means for conflicts.

Similar to Stage-3, Stage-4 also recognizes and uses social conventions; however, it is advanced in the sense that social conventions are no longer kept for dyadic relationships but for social systems. Law and order are taken into consideration as opposed to interpersonal relationship. Perspective taking goes from an interpersonal level to a larger societal level. People at this stage consider their actions in relation to their role in the society. Kohlberg found this type of reasoning among his adolescent subjects and concluded that a societal-level stage of moral judgment exists after Stage 3. At this stage, upholding sociomoral order no longer concerns mutual relationship but a need to maintain commonly accepted standards as basis for society.

Kohlberg articulated that the limitation for Stage 4 is that it does not define clear obligations to people outside the law and order (e.g., the nation-state) and that it does not provide rational guides to the creation of new norms. Stage 4 only stayed at the level of a law-maintaining perspective rather than law-making perspective.

According to Kohlberg (1984), people at the post conventional level understand and accept the conventions but the acceptance is based on a higher-level
understanding of moral principles. Therefore, people in stage 5 view law as flexible instrument and that they have the ability to create alternatives. They are aware that laws and rules are relative and it is amendable.

Lastly, Stage 6 regards what is right according to their individually chosen principles. Kohlberg labeled this stage as “universal ethical principles”. The rationale is that law and order rests upon these self-chosen principles and when laws violate these principles, each individual would act in accordance with their chosen principles. Such principles are conceived by Kohlberg (1984) as 1) principle of justice, 2) principle of role taking, or 3) principle of respect for personality.

According to Kohlberg’s six stages, moral maturity is not achieved until the post conventional level. One of the major criticisms to this assumption is that Stage 5 and Stage 6 should not be viewed as the highest stages of moral maturity. Gibbs (1991) stated that a mature stage of moral reasoning should be 1) common through humanity and 2) not restricted by cultural ideology. However, Kohlberg (1984) only found 13% of his longitudinal subjects reached Stage 5 and all of them are adults who have obtained some type of graduate education. Furthermore, none of Kohlberg’s longitudinal subjects reached Stage 6. This suggests the scarcity of stages 5 and 6 throughout human races. In addition, studies also demonstrate an absence of Stage 5 in certain cultures (Gibbs, 1991).

According to Gibbs (1991), only individuals with training in philosophy or other advanced education can achieve post conventional reasoning. This further supports his position that a mature stage should be a cross-cultural phenomenon rather than culture specific. He stated that stages 1 through 3 are replicated throughout different cultural groups and supported within context such as children’s friendship conceptions, interpersonal understanding, and prosocial reasoning. As a result, for
individuals who are in the dyadic relationship context, moral maturity is already
evident in Stage 3. As for the individuals living under a more complex social system,
moral adequacy would be evident in Stage 4.

To sum up, there are reasons to argue that a standard moral development
should only include the first four stages delineated in Kohlberg’s work with the first
two stages being the immature stages and the last two being the mature stages (Gibbs,
2003). According to Gibbs (2003), this maturation progress is a progression from
“superficial” to “profound”. He acknowledged the qualitative change from focusing
on salient features and individual interest to reciprocal relationships and then to
third-person perspective taking.

Whether it is Piaget’s phases from heteronomous to autonomous, Kohlberg’s
stages from preconvention to convention, or Gibbs’ rough age trends of immature to
mature, they’ve all identified the superficial to profound progression of moral
reasoning as children develop cognitively. For the younger age group, they reason at
the preconventional stages using heteronomous moral reasoning. Their moral
judgments are based on obedience to rigid rules and authority, avoidance of
punishment, and individualistic concerns. Children younger at approximately the age
of 7 lack the ability to take perspective of others because egocentrism limits them to
consider events from their own perspective (Kohlberg, 1984). Children at the
immature stage don’t differentiate between self and others nor do they consider the
interests of others. Furthermore, actions are judged according to visible consequences
rather than the psychological interests of others (Piaget, 1965). In terms of moral
reasoning, children of the immature stage employ strategies with tangible and
superficial characteristics. They tend to focus on their own needs, the tangible
outcome of an event rather than the abstract motive (Kohlberg, 1984).
As children develop, they progress from immature moral reasoning towards mature reasoning. Children were found to start using this more sophisticated reasoning at approximately age 8. Generally speaking, older children make greater use of intentional information in their moral judgments than would younger children (Zelazo, Helwig, & Lau, 1996). They pass the superficial level, which focuses reasoning mainly on physical and tangible qualities into a deeper level that is to reason at the conventional stages using autonomous morality. Older children begin to understand perspective taking and can exercise concepts such as reciprocity and equality.

Though identifying the phenomenon of moral development is important, it’s also essential to understand the processes that account for these stage-like developmental trends of going from the superficial to profound\(^5\). As Gibbs (2003) summarized, the one major cognitive process that can account for the progression of children’s moral development is Piaget’s idea of “centration”. Though Piaget’s centration was derived from explaining children’s conception of the physical/nonsocial world, it provided logical account for children’s conception in the sociomoral domain as well. Piaget used the notion of centration to explain younger children’s inability to perceive conservation tasks. In other words, preoperational children, according to Piaget (1965), focus on one aspect of a situation to the neglect of other important features. With conservation of liquid, he discovered that children “center” on the height of the water in the two containers, and fail to realize that the changes in height are compensated by changes in width. Some developmental psychologists called this centering of attention on just one aspect of a situation, “unidimensional thinking” (Case, 1998; Siegler, 1990).

\(^5\) This emphasis of progression from superficial to profound or concern for only the self to concern for others can also be found in other studies on children’s moral reasoning (Eisenberg, 1986).
Such a centration on the physical/nonsocial domain occurs in younger children’s cognition of the social domain as well. In fact, it is demonstrated through younger children’s 1) unidimensional, 2) superficial, and 3) egocentric thinking. Better yet, in Gibbs’ (2003) words, these characteristics are “variant of centraisons” involved in children’s moral judgment (p.26).

Similar to the nonsocial cognition, children are limited to unidimensional thinking. That is, they can’t keep track of multiple situations. In sociomoral development, preschoolers’ moral judgments are often times limited by salient punishment and authority figures. They focus only on one feature at a time. For example, when presented with Selman’s (1980) famous “Holly’s Dilemma” on whether Holly should climb up a tree to rescue her beloved kitten when her dad had warned her to not climb on trees. In this situation, a child might focus on the kitten first and predicts that Holly would climb the tree to rescue the kitten. However, when prompted to focus on the father and the salient consequences of punishment, she/he then switches her/his prediction to the opposite. This not only illustrates how centration processes in social cognition, but also that preschoolers’ moral judgments are often times capricious (Gibbs, 2003). The switching from one feature to another is not because of children’s mental effort in coordinating multiple features. Instead, it is dictated by which one feature is most salient at the moment. Borrowing Berk’s (2003) labeling, preschool children are less equipped to form “dual representation” of objects (nonsocial) and situation (social).

Given the difficulty in carrying out multidimensional thinking, younger children are easily captured by salient concepts and things. This leads to the superficial aspect of young children’s moral cognition. If young children tend to focus only on what is salient at the moment, it makes sense that mediation can help them...
better understand violent TV and to mitigate violent TV’s negative effects by pointing out to them the more significant features. Parents can direct younger children’s attention to the beneficial aspect of the program content rather than the harmful aspects such as aggressive behaviors or rewarding consequences.

With the same conservation task, Piaget found that children are easily distracted by superficial perceptual appearances (Berk, 2003). Superficiality functions in preschoolers’ moral judgment when they consider action more often than motivation. Superficial judgments in the social domain refer to children’s attention to or consideration of behavioral information over psychological information. For example, when presented with Piaget’s famous pairs of transgression stories about a naughty boy, children tend to judge the boy who accidentally broke 15 cups to be naughtier than boy who only broke 1 cup but for sneaking a cookie from a cookie jar. Rather than focusing on the intention, younger children made their decision on superficial tangible features. Consequently, actions are considered as physical features rather than as psychological interests of others.

This logic extends to children’s judgment of violence as well. Studies found that younger children relied more heavily on violence’s consequences to determine their moral judgments than did older children (Rule & Duker, 1973). By the same token, when children of this stage are presented with a televised violence, they base their moral judgment on superficial criteria such as physical consequences or avoidance of tangible punishments. Collins (1983) found that younger children (preschoolers and 2nd graders) make their moral judgments more on consequences rather than motives in violent programs. Another study also verified that young children, younger than seven years of age, tend to make moral judgments about violent acts base on tangible punishments (Krcmar & Cooke, 2001).
Kohlberg emphasized the importance of perspective taking in advancing through his stages of moral development; however, superficiality and unidimensional thinking bias children’s conceptions and judgments, making them egocentric. In other words, at the heteronomous stage (stage 1), children are less aware of other people’s perspectives. In the social domain, centration is not on others so much as on self. Hence, egocentrism can be viewed as self-centration. Nothing could be more salient than conceptions of the self. As children mature, they begin to develop the ability to truly take the perspectives of others. At this point, morality or being right is motivated by the concern, trust, and loyalty to others. Krcmar and Cooke (2001) found that while younger children (4-7 year-olds) thought unpunished violence was more right than punished violence, older children (8-11 year-olds) thought provoked violence was more right than unprovoked violence. Their open-ended interviews even show that older children demonstrated employment of motive-based reasoning more than the younger ones. This suggests that older children not only attend to the motive but also cite the character’s motive when evaluating his/her violent action.

As children’s experience increases, centration and superficiality will be displaced by the increased ability of multidimensional thinking and mental coordination. In other words, advances in moral judgments require a shift from centration to decentration. Piaget proposed that peer interaction could enhance such an advance whereas Kohlberg emphasized the importance of role taking opportunities among peers, in family and within the society. This further suggests the theoretical significant role of mediation in affecting children’s moral judgment.

With the established understanding of the importance to examine mediation effectiveness in a moral sense through Bandura’s interpretation of moral justification
and moral developmental theories, the paper’s next step is to see what mediation research has done in relation to this topic.

**Mediation Research**

Before examining mediation research in light of moral justification and moral development, the conceptual structure of mediation will be briefly described. Conceptually and operationally, mediation has been categorized into three-dimensional structure. Many studies adopted this framework as an approach to examine the effects of mediation on children and the various predictors of parental mediation (Austin et al., 1999; Nathanson, 1999). This framework includes active mediation, restrictive mediation, and coviewing. Active mediation refers to talking to children about television, restrictive mediation refers to setting rules on children’s television consumption, and coviewing refers to the simple act of watching television and sharing the viewing experience with children.

While the three dimensions are well accepted, active mediation has always been the central part of the conceptualization. In fact, given its particular communicative nature to directly influence children’s responses to television, studies found it to be the most effective form of mediation behavior (Nathanson, 1999). For the next part of this paper, a review of previous research on active mediation’s effectiveness in violence viewing and a discussion on the significance and possible effectiveness of “moral mediation”\(^6\) will be provided. Finally, a study examining the effectiveness of “moral mediation” based on the studies and theories discussed in this paper will be proposed.

**Effective Active Mediation**

\(^6\) “Moral mediation” will be defined and discussed presently.
Gathering from existing findings, it is concluded that factors such as the valence, form, and content of active mediation messages are relevant in explaining how and why certain active mediation work in the context of violent TV viewing. These three factors will be discussed accordingly.

First, in regards to valence, studies have suggested that active mediation can be neutral, negative, or positive. According to Austin et al., (1999), negative mediation refers to parental disapproval or condemnation of the mediated content. As stated by Nathanson (2001), negative mediation can make children less likely to accept and imitate TV content. Given that, it is logical to argue that negative mediation is more effective than positive or neutral mediation in mitigating violent TV’s negative effects on children. In fact, studies evidenced that since violent TV is usually mediated for its undesirable effects, active mediation that counteracts, condemns, or disapproves certain aspects of the violent TV is especially effective (Hicks, 1968; Nathanson, 1999). This suggests that moral mediation that makes negative evaluation of the violence seen on TV should be effective in decreasing negative effects.

Second, when speaking of mediation forms, scholars are referring specifically to the grammatical structure of a mediation message. According to Nathanson and Yang (2003), questions and statements are the two major forms of mediation. Unlike valence, form influences the effectiveness of mediation messages of violent content in a more complex manner. Instead of identifying one form of mediation message more effective over the other, studies found different forms to work differently in relation to children’s age and viewing experience. For example, according to Nathanson and Yang (2003), questions are more effective with older children whereas statements are more effective with younger children.
Two reasons were provided as to why statements are more effective than questions among younger children (Nathanson et al., 2003). First, since younger children are new media consumers, the answers they generate from a question can very well be inaccurate. That is, given their lack of prior knowledge in the relevant mediated information, it is likely that the questions will cause children to focus on irrelevant content which can further lead to inaccurate answers. With an inaccurate answer, younger children’s aggressive attitudes thus cannot be effectively mediated. Second, younger children have limited processing capacity and are lacking cognitive comprehension of TV content. It is likely that under a violence-viewing context, children don’t possess enough processing capacity to generate an accurate answer.

Different from younger children, older children were found to benefit more from question-form mediation rather than statement-form mediation (Nathanson et al., 2003). Since older children are more experienced and cognitively developed, they were found to benefit more from mediation questions. Furthermore, the authors speculated that statements, especially negative statements, directing at older children might be construed as condescending and being lectured. Due to the lecture style of mediation, older children may have developed a defense mechanism towards it.

Children’s prior knowledge influences the effectiveness of different mediation forms. For example, children with prior knowledge about television production techniques would have the advantage of generating accurate answers to mediation questions dealing with television production techniques. Therefore, prior knowledge on a certain topic suggests that the content of the message should be just as influential as mediation form. In fact, past mediation research has examined the effectiveness of mediation using various types of mediation messages. These message contents have addressed the perceived reality of TV content (Nathanson & Yang, 2003), the
relationship between scenes of action adventure TV shows (Collins, Wellman, Keniston, & Westby, 1978), the social consequences of violent characters (Nathanson, 2004) and the moral judgments of televised violent behaviors (Corder-Bolz, 1980; Hicks, 1968).

Earlier in the development of mediation literature, scholars have identified mediation statements to be “informational and attitudinal” (p.97) in nature (Corder-Bolz & O’Bryant, 1978). Recently, attempting to examine mediation in a more structural manner, Nathanson (2004) proposed two metacategories for mediation message contents, factual and evaluative. These categories were proposed hoping to better analyze and synthesize the success and failure of existing active mediation strategies. Interestingly, they resonate with the “informational and attitudinal” nature of mediation mentioned in Corder-Bolz et al.’s, (1978) study. Specifically, factual mediation was conceptualized as the understanding of television production, which is informational in nature (e.g., telling children that characters seen on television are just actors). Evaluative mediation was defined as the undesirability of violence or violent characters. More specifically, evaluative mediation, attitudinal in nature, contains messages that tell children about the negative consequences of violence.

To further elaborate and conceptualize factual and evaluative mediation, factual mediation includes content messages that provide facts and information without cues of value judgments. Given the informational nature of factual mediation, they are usually neutral in valence. Mediation messages addressing perceived reality (Nathanson et al., 2003) and comprehension of inter-scene relations (Collins, Wellman, Keniston, & Westby, 1978) are examples of factual mediation. Evaluative mediation refers to messages that communicate value judgments, whether they are negative or positive in valence. Given its attitudinal nature, message contents such as
social consequences (Nathanson, 2004) and moral judgment (Hicks, 1968) are examples of evaluative mediation (Figure 3).

Besides sharing characteristics such as being neutral and informative, factual mediation assumes that the factual knowledge being discussed (i.e., perception of reality and comprehension of inter-scene relation) is the cognitive mechanism leading to children’s aggression. That is, by accurately perceiving the reality portrayed on violent TV and accurately comprehending the relationship between violent scenes, child viewers should be less vulnerable to violent TV.

Two mediation studies done in the past can help illustrate the idea of factual mediation. First, Nathanson and Yang (2003) have demonstrated how factual mediation addressing perceived reality could mitigate violent TV’s effect on children. They tested the effect of factual reality mediation on children’s response to violent TV. By doing so, heavy viewers discounted the realism of the violent TV through their increased knowledge of TV production techniques. Indeed, they found a decrease in heavy viewers’ violent tendencies.

7 “Those people in this TV show are just actors playing a part.” (p.130)
Second, Collins et al. (1978) found adult commentary that facilitates children’s comprehension of inter-scene relationships helped increase children’s understanding of implicit program content. By verbally commenting the relationship between televised behaviors and the motivations and consequences related to the behaviors, children were found to make inferences about implicit content more so than when no verbal comments were provided. Though this study did not measure children’s aggression, the authors did mention that with children’s facilitated plot comprehension, the effect of observed aggression on viewers’ behavior and attitude could be moderated. This suggests that factual mediation can be effective.

Though there is evidence supporting the effectiveness of factual mediation, it is suggested that using evaluative mediation can promote even more positive outcomes from child viewers (Nathanson, 2004). In general, evaluative mediation refers to mediation content that deals with value judgments. To be more specific, it can be further categorized into judgment-only and judgment with reasoning messages. Judgment-only evaluative mediation is messages that solely point out the evaluation of certain viewed behaviors and attitudes on TV. For example, studies that used expressions such as “that’s wrong”, “that’s really something” (Hicks, 1968), “terrible”, “disgusting” (Horton & Santogrossi, 1978) and “smart” (Grusec, 1973) in their mediations can all be categorized under this sub-category. In fact, all of these studies have found using judgment-only evaluative mediation to be effective.

Negative judgment-only messages helped children learn that violence is undesirable. According to Nathanson (1999), negative judgment is communicating to child viewers that the violent TV is unimportant. Consequently, this perceived unimportance then shapes children’s aggressive tendencies. Evidently, these study
results provided evidence and possible explanations for the effectiveness of judgment-only evaluative mediation.

Unlike judgment-only evaluative mediation, judgment-with-reasoning evaluative mediation provides explanations to the value judgments. While this type of mediation makes right-wrong, good-bad, and yes-no judgments that vary in topics such as social reality, and moral issues, it also provides reasoning as to why such a judgment was made. Recently, Nathanson (2004) designed a message content that evaluated the violent behaviors and violent characters along with reasoning of social acceptance. Regardless of age, the mediation was found to be effective. She argued that this is due to the fact that this mediation addresses social messages that are very relevant to children, who were the recipients of the messages. From the reasoning perspective, it is also possible to argue that since children care for attention and popularity, a negative mediation with explanations of the social acceptance for TV violence yielded positive outcomes in children. The mediation provided social consequences of behaviors that children could easily connect with their personal encounters in school or other limited social situations as explanations for the negative judgment. Although not a lot of mediation research tested the effectiveness of judgment-with-reasoning as mediation messages, existing ones suggested positive outcomes (Nathanson, 2004; Nathanson & Yang, 2003).

*Importance of “Moral Mediation”*

Whether it is judgment-only or judgment-with-reasoning evaluative mediation, the focus of this paper--- moral mediation--- conceptually belongs to the evaluative mediation category. For the sake of simplicity, active mediation that evaluates violent

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8 “All of those people in the TV show are NOT cool. Even the guys in the masks aren’t cool. Nobody likes people who act like they do.” (p.326)
behaviors or characters in a moral sense will be labeled as “moral mediation” from this point forward.

Many existing studies have witnessed the positive effect of moral mediation in the context of violence viewing. Hicks (1968) tested the effects of positive moral judgment and negative moral judgment on children’s reaction to a violent film. He found that negative moral judgment on how wrong a violent behavior is resulted in fewer aggressive imitations than positive moral judgment. By condemning the violent behavior, this type of negative moral mediation is essentially evaluating aggression to be an inappropriate method of conflict resolution. It is making an evaluation that the behavior is morally incorrect and unacceptable.

Although no mediation study has made the connection between adults’ mediation messages with the perspective of moral development, negative moral evaluations and justification are the underlying themes in many of the explored mediation messages, especially under violent viewing context. In fact, many operationalized mediation messages as a negative moral evaluation of violent characters or behaviors. For example, in an experimental design examining the effectiveness of adult commentary on imitation of aggression, Hicks (1968) had an adult experimenter make negative moral evaluative statements such as “That’s wrong”. Grusec (1973) also found that active mediation that comments on the acceptability of aggressive behavior could decrease older children’s imitation.

Besides experimental studies, studies have also found parents to engage in active verbal mediation that encompassed statements defining or questioning television events on a “right-wrong” dimension (Desmond et al., 1990). If mediation studies have already operationalized active mediation messages into moral mediations

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9 “He shouldn’t do that…That’s wrong…That’s awful.”(p.305)
and parents are talking to their kids about violent TV by making right-wrong judgments, how is it that there exists no research that emphasizes the significance of moral mediation?

Outcome measures measuring children’s moral reasoning (Bjorkqvist & Lagerspetz, 1985) and perceived justification of characters (Nathanson & Yang, 2003) in children’s television violence studies and mediation studies are two more pieces of evidence that suggest the importance of moral mediation. If studies are already using moral judgment measures as outcome measures of violent TV’s effect on children’s aggression, it is even more justifiable to take on a moral perspective in understanding the effectiveness of active mediation in violence viewing.

Besides the moral justification related research done in the area of mediation, media effects research also has results suggesting the importance of moral mediation. As delineated in the first half of this paper, moral justification is thought to be the most obvious in the expression of violent conduct (Bandura, 1986). In line with this logic, various media effect studies suggested that justification of violence serves as a strong mediating variable in predicting viewers’ aggressive behavior, pro-violence attitudes, hostility, and disinhibition (Funk, Buchman, Jenks, & Bechtoldt, 2003; Moore & Tracey, 1996; Wilson et al., 2002). That is, moral justification works as a cognitive strategy to intervene violent TV’s effect on children’s aggression.

Moral justification as the mediating cognitive mechanism between television exposure and aggressive tendency is further suggested by a study that found the effect of violent television on children’s moral reasoning through the portrayal of justified violence (Krcmar & Valkenburg, 1999). According to Krcmar et al. (1999), heavy viewers tend to have less stringent standards of justified violence than low viewers. This implies that violent TV can shape children’s attitude towards aggression through
moral reasoning. The more children find violence to be acceptable, the higher their pro-violence attitude may be. This is especially true when violent cartoons often present violence in “performer sequences” (Cerulo, 2002, p.260; Krcmar & Vieira, 2005). Instead of telling a story from a victim’s perspective, violent cartoon familiarize its child viewers with the aggressor’s mind set, which is often times filled with justification for violence. The aggressor emphasizes the necessity to use violent as a means of resort, which in turn makes justification for violence a salient concept for child viewers. When justification for violence is salient or becomes the schema for resolving conflicts, they yield higher levels of aggression. After all, justification for violence disengages children’s inhibition for behaving violently (Bandura, 1986).

If moral justification mediates children’s aggressive behaviors and attitudes, it is speculated that moral mediation which talks about the moral judgment of violent act on TV can interfere with violent TV’s shaping of children’s moral reasoning (Figure 4). From the traces of (1) moral mediation in existing active mediation studies to (2) perceived justification as children’s outcome measures to (3) moral justification as mediator for violence effect, it is evident that moral mediation that speaks to children’s moral reasoning or justification play an important role when it comes to mitigating violent TV’s negative effect on children. As suggested by Krcmar and Vieira (2005), family discussion about moral issues can help children establish schemas to deal with moral dilemma.

![Figure 4: Conceptual Model of Moral Mediation](image)

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While it is important to focus on moral mediation in general, moral developmental theories underscore the importance to be aware of developmental differences when considering the effectiveness of moral mediation. As reviewed earlier, moral developmental studies suggested that children use and understand moral justification differently according to their developmental level. As a result, it seems to makes sense to focus on the moral aspect of mediation and tease out the mechanism behind the effectiveness of moral mediation through a moral developmental perspective. However, to date, no studies have taken on the moral developmental perspective. Therefore, several questions are yet to be answered. First, does parental moral mediation affect children’s attitudes toward violent TV? Second, does moral mediation function according to children’s developmental differences? Third, how does moral mediation trigger children’s use of moral reasoning according to their moral development? Fourth, how does moral mediation affect children’s moral evaluation of aggression and attitude formation?

**Conceptualizing Moral Mediation and Its Possible Outcomes**

Having reviewed the important factors contributing to effective active mediation in the context of violent TV and the possible significance of moral mediation, it is clear that in order for moral mediation to be theoretically effective, factors such as valence, form, and content should be taken into consideration. Since the previous discussion has already addressed the “content” factor of moral mediation, the next section will delineate the effectiveness of moral mediation from the perspective of valence and form. Aside from conceptualizing an effective moral mediation from the perspective of its valence and form, potential outcomes expected as a result of engaging in moral mediation will be discussed as well.
In terms of valence, studies found that negative moral mediation decreases children’s imitation of media violence (Hicks, 1968). Studies also found that mediation that not only morally condemns the aggressive behavior but also provides alternative solutions to resolve the conflict can decrease children’s aggressive attitudes (Corder-Bolz, 1980). In fact, mediation that solely provides alternative solutions without directly pointing out the incorrect behavior is found to be just as effective (Horton & Santogrossi, 1978). Children receiving anti-aggressive comments were faster to seek help from adults when witnessing interpersonal violence (Horton & Santogrossi, 1978). Perhaps these findings suggest that the more the information is provided on the choice of moral judgment, the less aggressive children will be and the less positive they will feel towards violence seen on TV.

Although suggesting an alternative solution through mediation message does not seem negative in valence, according to Austin (2001), negative mediation “does not always appear explicitly negative in tone, but the terminology reflects the critical tone that analytical comments tend to take” (p.388). This “critical tone” captures the nature of alternative solution mentioned here. A clear negative word might not have been used for the moral judgment but other evaluations function similarly through the analytical tone.

Austin (2001) further stated that negative mediation is more explanatory in nature. That is, mediation messages that criticize or analyze a TV show through explanation without direct usage of negative words are conceptualized as negative mediation as well. Simply put, negative mediation is one super-ordinate category of mediation that encompasses several mediation strategies and one of which includes mentioning of alternative solution or an explanation behind the negative judgment.

10 “It is bad to fight. It is better to get help.” (p.112)
11 “There are other ways instead of shooting…Talking or just giving himself up.” (p.338)
If negative moral mediation doesn’t just have to be a negative evaluation of the violent behaviors or characters, perhaps the effectiveness of negative moral mediation lies not only on its negative and analytical tone but also the pieces of information provided. Whether it is an alternative solution or an explanation behind the judgment, maybe the more pieces of information about the undesirability of violence, the more references children will have to base their own judgment on. As suggested by Horton and Santogrossi (1978), children use “adult’s evaluative comments as a reference in modifying their own definition” and thus demonstrated positive outcomes such as being less aggressive or faster in summoning help when witnessing real-life violence. Consequently, it is expected that through explanations and provision of alternative solution, children’s definition of aggression can be modified.

Within the realm of moral developmental research, “moral judgment” and “moral reasoning” are two terms often used interchangeably to express people’s cognitive “ability to make ethical choices when presented with a moral dilemma and the ability to articulate reasons for those choices” (Krcmar & Curtis, 2003, p.464). For conceptual clarity within mediation research; however, it makes more sense to conceptualize moral judgment as the act of making right-wrong ethical choices and to conceptualize moral reasoning as the thinking process or explanation for making those choices.

Continuing from Austin’s (2001) line of logic, the more explanations made through moral mediation, the more ready children are to internalize moral standards. That is, moral mediation would be more effective if both moral judgments and moral reasoning are provided to children. After all, it is suggested in Bandura’s social cognitive theory that reasoning can facilitate the internalization of moral standards.
Research in parental discipline also underscores moral reasoning’s significance to moral judgment. This line of research suggests that talking and reasoning with children about misdeeds has a more prosocial effect than using harsher condescending techniques of making direct moral judgments such as “that’s wrong” (Dix, 1992; Hoffman, 2000).

One of the implications from the parental disciplinary research is that moral reasoning facilitates the internalization of moral values (Hoffman, 2000), which in turn regulates aggressive attitudes and behaviors (Bandura, 2001). Although the effect of providing moral mediation while watching violent TV has not been explored in previous research, there is some relevant empirical work that suggests this might be an effective strategy.

In a non-media context, Brody and Henderson (1977) found that moral judgments accompanied by a rationale resulted more increase of children’s adoption of moral judgmental standards from adults than moral judgments alone. Again, this implies that the provision of moral reasoning as the basis for moral judgments can yield more positive outcomes in children. Although this particular study only found an increased adoption of moral standards, as suggested by Bandura (2001), moral standards help regulate behaviors and attitudes. Consequently, theoretically, exposure to mediation of moral judgment and moral reasoning not only can facilitate children to internalize moral standards, but also help them to be less aggressive and have less positive attitudes toward televised violence.

Besides internalization, Piaget’s concept of equilibration serves as another theoretical explanation for the possible effectiveness of moral mediation on children’s attitudes towards televised violence. Equilibrium within moral cognition refers to a steady and comfortable condition within moral reasoning. For example, children
without being challenged with more advanced or complex moral reasoning would be in equilibrium. When provided with a modeled view, children are given either new or conflicting information that evokes disequilibrium within them (Berk, 2003; Ruffy, 1981). Better yet, these conflicting views represent higher levels of moral reasoning. Attempting to solve the disequilibrium, children will process the judgment and reasoning provided by the adult. In order to reach back to equilibrium, children will reorganize their original cognitive structure with the newly encountered information. In essence, it is through the process of equilibration when children learn and develop their moral reasoning and attitudes. In fact, elementary school children’s moral judgment has been found to be promoted by adults’ influence of cognitive disequilibrium (McCann & Prentice, 1981). The concept of equilibration again resonates with the previous argument on the importance of providing moral reasoning along with moral judgment (Brody & Henderson, 1977) when speaking of effective mediation.

By the same token, when adults are engaging in moral mediation of violent contents, their judgment provides conflicting views to that of their children’s, which were previously shaped by television. As suggested by Piaget’s equilibration, moral judgment evokes disequilibrium in children but with the presence of moral reasoning in a mediation message, it assists children to reach equilibrium by adopting the new moral standard presented through mediation.

Besides valence, the grammatical form of moral mediation also makes it an effective approach. That is, since moral reasoning is found to facilitate simple moral judgments (e.g. “that’s wrong”), perhaps the statement form of moral mediation can yield different results on children depending on whether the explanation is accompanied with a judgment.
Though past research suggests that the statement form of mediation backfired on older children, it has only been tested using perceived reality as the mediation content (Nathanson & Yang 2003). It is unclear as to whether children would respond differently with different mediation topics. One would speculate that since simple judgments without explanation sound more condescending, perhaps mediation providing only moral judgments would be less effective than moral mediation that includes both moral judgment and moral reasoning.

In the past, the effectiveness of mediation in mitigating violence-prone attitudes has been assessed using a combination of various outcome variables indicating children negative orientation toward violence content. In order to stay consistent and to mimic similar mediation studies, this study will examine mediation’s effect on children’s attitudes with the following variables on negative orientation towards mediated content: (1) evaluation of program, characters, and violence, and (2) motivation to engage in violent acts (e.g., desirability to imitate violent characters, attitudes toward aggressive behavior).

To sum up, there are theoretical and empirical reasons to suspect that mediation addressing both moral judgments and reasoning will be successful in mitigating violent TV’s effect on children. Therefore,

H1: Children receiving judgment-with-reasoning moral mediation will have more negative orientation toward the content viewed in the experiment than children receiving judgment-only moral mediation.

In this study, the negative orientation toward viewed content refers to five separate attitude measures used in previous mediation research (Nathanson & Cantor, 2000; Nathanson & Yang, 2003; Nathanson, 2004). The five measures include (a) evaluation of programs, (b) attitude towards characters, (c) evaluation of justified
violence, (d) desirability to imitate, and (e) aggressive tendencies. It was argued that mediation messages are considered effective if the five measures yield negative attitude towards the TV content from children.

While it is theoretically and empirically supported to include moral reasoning in mediation messages, in order to have optimal effect, the earlier review on moral developmental research and mediation studies underscores the importance of mediation recipients’ age. That is, besides including reasoning into mediation messages, it is also crucial to create age-appropriate moral reasoning mediation messages.

As mentioned earlier, younger children are limited by one-dimensional, superficial, and egocentric thinking to understand abstract ideas such as motives. They also tend to make moral judgments based on tangible events such as consequences and punishments. Consequently, they should benefit more from moral reasoning messages that emphasize on violent consequences and punishments. In other words, if children are mediated with moral mediation messages that address the character’s intention as the reasoning for the moral judgment, young children are not cognitively equipped to benefit from it. As for older children, since they have the cognitive ability to decenter and take perspectives of other people, they might benefit more from moral mediation addressing reasoning focusing on the motivations of violent behaviors. As a result, the following hypotheses are proposed.

H2: The effect of moral mediation will depend on the age of the child, such that consequence-based moral reasoning will be more effective than motive-based moral reasoning for younger children and motive-based moral reasoning will be more effective than consequence-based moral reasoning for older children.
Besides mitigating aggressive attitudes and behaviors as possible outcomes of moral mediation, another outcome variable that has been overlooked among mediation research is moral reasoning. How might moral mediation facilitate children’s use of mature moral reasoning?

Recent studies have found that frequent exposure to televised fantasy and realistic violence is related with fewer uses of less advanced moral reasoning strategies when reasoning for moral evaluation (Krcmar & Valkenberg, 1999; Krcmar & Vieira, 2005). Though the majority of studies on moral reasoning focus on how children think about and resolve distributive justice dilemmas (Kohlberg, 1984), transgression dilemmas (Piaget, 1965) and prosocial dilemmas (Eisenberg et al., 1990), Krcmar and colleagues have developed interpersonal violence dilemmas comparable to the violence seen on TV (i.e., Moral Interpretation of Interpersonal Violence scale) and found a similar mechanism functioning behind children’s moral reasoning of interpersonal violence that mirrors televised violence (Krcmar & Valkenberg, 1999).

Specifically, Krcmar and Vieira (2005) stressed that by enforcing less advanced moral reasoning such as stereotypical reasoning, cognitive skills (e.g., perspective taking) that reduce aggressive attitudes and internalize moral values can be discouraged. According to Krcmar and Valkenburg (1999), stereotypical reasoning are direct moral judgments that “stereotyped images of good and bad behavior; use words such as ‘should’ without giving reason” (p.621). Unfortunately, examining previous mediation studies, stereotypical reasoning has been used frequently by scholars when testing the effectiveness of mediation messages in experimental setting. Some examples are, “that’s wrong”, “he shouldn’t hit…” (Hicks, 1968), or “it’s bad to fight” (Corder Bolz, 1980).
Although the original intention for these mediation messages was to mitigate aggressive attitudes, more recent research are suggesting that they might have overlooked the same message’s effect on children’s development in moral reasoning. Similarly, if parents only provide stereotypical moral judgments without explanations, it is likely that they are encouraging children to reason in a biased and less mature manner. That is, they may be encouraging their children to exercise immature moral reasoning.

The possibility that moral mediation with provision of more advanced reasoning can facilitating children’s moral development is further supported with Kohlberg’s (1984) view on children’s stage-3 of his proposed moral developmental stages (i.e., mature moral reasoning). According to Kohlberg’s (1984), even when children reach stage-3, given their limited experience within only interpersonal context such as family and siblings, children can still easily exercise their stereotypical reasoning. Since violent TV often times depicts interpersonal conflicts outside of family or school context, children is likely to be unfamiliar with the situation. Consequently, without appropriate guidance such as moral mediation that explicates reasons for evaluation, children may resort to using simple and immature but more familiar reasoning strategies such as stereotypical reasoning.

To sum up, if studies are suggesting possible relationship between violent TV and moral development, it makes sense to examine moral mediation’s impact children’s moral reasoning strategies. Therefore,

H3: Children receiving judgment-with-reasoning moral mediation will show more advanced moral reasoning for judgment of televised violence than children receiving judgment-only moral mediation.
Besides experimental studies, correlational mediation studies assessing the occurrence of mediation in the homes also found that parents report to provide moral reasoning along with their moral judgments. Parents report that they point out “why” some things actors do are good or bad. Parents also report explaining the motives of the characters (Bybee et al. 1982; Valkenburg et al., 1999).

Although studies show that parents make comments about the morality of characters at home, we still do not know if their children benefit from it. As delineated above, if mediation addressing both moral judgments and reasoning help to facilitate children’s internalization of moral values, which in turn affects aggressive attitudes, parents’ self-report on moral mediation should affect children’s negative orientation toward violent content. Therefore,

H4: Parental moral mediation of violent TV will be associated with children’s negative orientation toward viewed content.
CHAPTER 3

METHOD

This cross-sectional study involved the participation of both parents and children with parents completing a survey while children participated in an experiment. Participants were recruited from 12 school-based after-school programs of Columbus Public School in Ohio.

Parent’s Survey

Participants and Procedures

Data from 216 parents of children ranging from age 4-11 (kindergarten to 5th grade) were collected to assess their moral mediation behaviors. After gaining permission from the 12 after-school programs, parents arriving to pick up their children were approached by a researcher with a study packet. The study packet included a solicitation letter, consent form, and an anonymous survey. Parents were asked to participate and grant permission for their children’s participation by signing the consent form and completing a 10-minute long survey\textsuperscript{12}.

In order to reach a higher return rate, parent participants were first encouraged to complete the study packet at the program site. However, for those with time constraints, they were requested to complete the survey at home and return it to the researcher the next day when arriving at the after-school program. Approximately 82% of the parents completed the survey at the after-school program.

\textsuperscript{12} Alumni Grants for Graduate Research and Scholarship was made available for this study through the Graduate School of the Ohio State University halfway through the data collection; therefore, 66 parent-child pair was provided with 8 dollars of monetary incentive for their participation.
In the survey, parents were asked to assess their moral mediation behaviors under four genres of violent television show. Shows identified by past parental mediation research were used (Nathanson, 2001). The four genre types were: live-action adventure programs (e.g., “Power Rangers SPD”, “Power Rangers Generations”), realistic action cartoons (“Batman”, “Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles”), and classic cartoons (e.g., “Bugs Bunny,” “Looney Tunes”). Examples representing each genre of violent programs were provided to help parents accurately identify each genre types.

As suggested in Nathanson’s (1999) study regarding parent and child’s perspectives on mediation, the need to specify genre types as opposed to using the aggregate label of “violent programs” is necessary for the purpose of avoiding socially desirable responses. Other studies have also encouraged and verified the significance of delineating genre types for yielding more accurate measurement of parental mediation (Nathanson, 2001; Yang & Nathanson, 2005).

Parent participants were also asked to report general demographic information which revealed that 71% were mothers and 58% had received at least a college degree. Given that previous mediation research reported that mothers are more likely to evaluate television for their children (Mohr, 1979; Valkenburg et al., 1999) and that parents with higher levels of education are more likely to discuss program content with their children (Gross & Walsh, 1980; Komaya & Bowyer, 2000), this sample appears to be consistent with past research.

**Parent’s Survey Measures**

Parental moral mediation information was collected for the purpose of understanding its relationship with children’s responses toward violent television programs. To measure parental moral mediation, four sub-scales were created to
capture all dimensions of the concept, judgment-only moral mediation, consequence-based moral mediation, motive-based moral mediation, and general moral mediation. Several items in the scales were adapted from Valkenburg et al.’s (1999) instructive mediation measurement.

For each of the sub-scales, on a range of 1 (“never”) to 5 (“every time”), parents were asked to respond to four items asking how often they engage in each specific moral mediation behaviors of the target genre type. All four of the sub-scales were listed under the three genre types mentioned above. Parents were also given an extra response option if the question did not apply to them because their child does not watch the type of genre mentioned (Appendix A).

**Judgment-only moral mediation.** This sub-scale asked parents to estimate how often they engage in mediation behaviors that point out the right, wrong, good, or bad aspects of the characters on TV when their child watches each of the three genres (e.g., For action adventure programs, how often do you point out that some things characters do are wrong?”). Since parents were asked to report their mediation behaviors according to the three types of genres, a total of 12 items were collected to reflect parents’ judgment-only moral mediation. By averaging the 12 items, a judgment-only scale was created ($M = 3.0, SD = .95, \alpha = .96$).

**Consequence-based moral mediation.** This sub-scale asked parents to estimate how often they engage in moral mediation behaviors that discuss the outcome or consequences of characters’ behaviors (e.g., “For action adventure programs, how often do you explain the consequences of characters’ behaviors?”). The three genre types measured in the survey result in a total of 12 items to reflect parents’ consequence-based mediation. A scale was created by averaging together the twelve items ($M = 2.9, SD = 1.0, \alpha = .96$).
Motive-based moral mediation. Parents were asked to report how often they engage in moral mediation that reasons the motivation behind characters’ behaviors (e.g., “For action adventure programs, how often do you identify the intentions of characters?”). Given the three genre types measured in the survey, a total of 12 items were collected to reflect parents’ motive-based moral mediation. A scale was created by averaging the twelve items ($M = 2.7$, $SD = 1.0$, $\alpha = .97$).

General moral mediation. Four more items were designed to tap parents’ overall use of moral mediation (e.g., “For action adventure programs, how often do you point out why some things characters do are right?”). With the three genre types measured in the survey, a total of 12 items were collected to reflect parents’ general moral mediation. A general moral mediation scale was created by averaging the twelve items ($M = 2.9$, $SD = 1.0$, $\alpha = .97$).

Children’s Experiment and Survey

Participants and Procedures

Approximately 93% of the parent participants granted permission for their children to participate in this study. As a result, data were collected from a total of 201 children ranging in age from 4-to 11-years-old (53% female). This age range was selected because it not only provides parallel age groups comparable to the population that much of previous mediation work has studied (Nathanson, 2004; Nathanson & Yang, 2003), but also allowed room to examine developmental differences in the effect of moral mediation on children’s aggressive attitudes and moral reasoning.

Consequently, two distinct age groups, “younger” versus “older” were established so that developmental differences of moral reasoning could be explored. “Younger children” refers to children who are still in the process of developing more mature cognitive skills and, therefore, have the tendency to reason using immature
moral reasoning techniques. “Older children” reflects ones who are more cognitively developed and, hence, have the ability to evaluate situations using more mature moral reasoning skills. Consistent with the age ranges known to reveal age differences in moral judgment of media aggression (Krcmar & Cooke, 2001; Rule & Duker, 1973), the “younger” group represents children ages 4-7 (47%) and the “older” group ages 8-11 (53%).

Given the location of 12 different after-school programs, a diverse racial sample were obtained with 45% African American children, 43% Caucasian children, 3% Asian children, and 1% Hispanic children. The remaining children self-reported into a category labeled “other”.

This experimental portion was conducted by the principal investigator of this study. Prior to the principal investigator’s arrival at the after-school program, children who were granted permission were assigned randomly into one of the four conditions (judgment-only moral mediation, consequence-based moral mediation, motive-based moral mediation, and control). To ensure every after-school program has an even distribution of younger versus older children within each condition, children’s grade levels were taken into consideration during the random assignment process.

On the day of data collection, the principal investigator was first introduced to the children by a teacher. She then announced the names of the first group of participants. Upon being called, the children were led to a media room or a library equipped with television and VCR for the study. Children were tested one group per condition at a time in groups of 1 to 7 ($M_o = 5$).

Once brought into the media room, the principal investigator first introduced herself and then asked children to provide their verbal assent for participation. In

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13 Children of mixed descent tend to circle “other” as their racial category.
addition, children were also assured that participation is voluntary and that they can withdraw their participation at any time during the study. Lastly, before viewing, the author reminded each child to avoid talking during viewing and to save their questions until the end of the study.

Children in all four of the conditions were shown with a 7-minute edited episode of the children’s TV show, “Los Luchadores.” The show featured three hero wrestlers using violence as means to protect civilians from their obstructive enemies. The 7-minute edited version included three separate justified violent scenes performed by three hero wrestlers.

Scene one depicted a male hero trying to stop villains from damaging a police car and taking a police away. The scene ended when the male hero threw fireballs at the villains from his motorcycle but was attacked by the villains and fell off the motorcycle instead. Scene two included a heroine wrestling with three villains but was kidnapped by the end of the scene. The final scene depicted two male heroes using violence as means to save the kidnapped female wrestler from the villains. The scene ended when the female wrestler was saved by the two male wrestlers. Between each scene, a 15-second silent black screen was inserted for the purpose of delivering moral mediation messages. A female experimenter delivered moral mediation designed for each condition during the three pauses.

Immediately after the last moral mediation was delivered, children were given a 20-minute questionnaire to complete (Appendix B). In order to ensure that all questions were answered and that younger children can read the questions, each question and its response options were read to the children. Children were asked to circle and/or write down their answers. For the children who were unable to write due to poor spelling ability, assistance was provided by the principal investigator. After
each question was read out loud to the children, they were reminded to answer by circling rather than verbalizing to the principal investigator. This was done to avoid possible individual effects within each condition group.

To further ascertain the survey’s readability for the child participants in this study, a computerized survey item readability assessment was conducted using Microsoft Office Word 2003 program’s Flesch Reasing Ease Index. Flesch Reading Ease Index Result is a common readability index that provides a score between 0 and 100. The higher the score, the easier the content is to read. According to Calderon et al. (2006), a score greater than 75 means that the survey is suitable for population with limited literacy.

This assessment serve as a way to gauge how well children ranging from age 4 to 11 can comprehend the survey questions used in this study. The assessment result for the children’s survey used in this study indicates a Flesch Reading Ease Index of 90.0. Since the population of this study includes elementary students who are still developing their literacy skills and might still be limited in literacy skills, an index of 90.0 suggests that the survey should be easy to read for elementary school children.

Upon completing their questionnaire, a debriefing session was delivered informing children that what they just saw isn’t real and that they shouldn’t imitate after the characters. Children were also given time to raise questions.

*Experimental Manipulation*¹⁴

*Judgment-only moral mediation*. Approximately 25% of the recruited children (*n* = 50) received moral mediation with messages that were only moral judgments but with no explanations for the judgments. Specifically, these children were told with mediation messages such as, “Maria was wrong to fight the Hula people like that.

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¹⁴ Refer to Appendix C for complete moral mediation messages.
Fighting like that is wrong. You don’t solve a problem that way and it’s wrong to hit people.” A different but similar judgment-only moral mediation that reflects the same concept and is relevant to the scene was delivered during each pause.

**Consequence-based moral mediation.** Approximately 25% of the recruited children \((n = 51)\) received moral mediation with messages emphasis of reasoning for moral judgment focusing on consequences of the viewed violent act (e.g., “Turbine was wrong to throw fireballs at the Hula people like that. Throwing things at people like that is wrong. In fact, Turbine even fell on the ground and got himself hurt. It’s wrong to solve a problem like that because Turbine even got himself hurt!”).

**Motive-based moral mediation.** Approximately 25% of the recruited children \((n = 50)\) received moral mediation with emphasis of reasoning for moral judgment focusing on motivation of the viewed violent act (e.g., “Turbine wanted the Hula people to listen to him but that doesn’t mean he can throw fireballs at them. Throwing things at people like that is wrong. He didn’t solve the problem at all. Just because you want other people to listen to you, doesn’t mean you can hurt them. It’s wrong to solve a problem like that”).

**Control group.** Approximately 25% of the recruited children \((n = 50)\) served as a control group. No mediation was delivered for this group while they watched the program. During the 10-second pauses in between scenes, the experimenter explained why the pauses are there by saying “I’ve taken the commercials out here. So just wait quietly for the next scene.”

**Orientation Toward the Mediated Content**

Children’s orientation towards the mediated content is a super-ordinate construct with five dimensions: evaluation of programs, attitude towards characters, evaluation of justified violence, desirability to imitate, and aggressive tendencies. These
dimensions of orientation toward the content have been used in previous mediation studies and, therefore, deemed their validity (Nathanson & Cantor, 2000; Nathanson & Yang, 2003; Nathanson, 2004). All measures were measured using a 3-point scale with choices ranging from “No” to “Sort of” to “Yes” as the response options and were coded as 1 through 3, respectively (Appendix B).

**Evaluation of the program.** Using two questions, children were asked to answer whether they like the show and whether wanted to see the show again (e.g., “Did you like this show?”, “Would you like to see this show again?”). These two items were averaged to create a scale, $M = 2.3$, $SD = .73$, $r(201) = .62$, $p < .001$, $\alpha = .76$.

**Attitudes toward the characters.** With two questions for each character, children were asked how much they wanted to be like the character and how much they liked the character (e.g., “Do you wish you could be like Maria?”, “Did you like Maria in the show?”). By averaging the six items together, a scale measuring children’s attitude towards characters was created, $M = 2.1$, $SD = .60$, $\alpha = .80$.

**Evaluation of violence.** Children were asked to express their moral judgments of violence seen previously in the show by answering three questions such as: “Was Turbine right to throw fireballs at the Hula people?”. A scale was created by averaging the three questions together, $M = 1.8$, $SD = .74$, $\alpha = .86$.

**Desirability to imitate.** Children’s desirability towards the heroes was tapped using two questions (e.g., “Do you wish you could fight like Turbine?”). Responses were averaged to create a scale, $M = 2.0$, $SD = .86$, $r(201) = .76$, $p < .001$, $\alpha = .86$.

**Aggressive tendencies.** The last measurement for children’s orientation toward the viewed content used Nathanson and Cantor’s (2000) aggression scale to measure children’s aggressive tendencies after viewing. Children were presented with six
statements describing aggressive attitudes. Responses were averaged to create a scale, $M = 1.4, SD = .46, \alpha = .80.$

Moral Reasoning

After making an evaluation of the violence, children were then asked to provide the reasons for their evaluations. Each open-ended question was followed immediately after each item tapping for children’s evaluation of violence as means of capturing children’s moral reasoning for their judgment. For example, “Was Maria right to hit the Hula people? Why?” Children were asked to write down their reasons themselves but assistance was provided to those who have difficulty in writing or spelling. A total of three open-ended questions were administered for the mediated content and were later coded into seven different categories. The coding scheme is discussed below.

Evaluation of Unjustified and Justified Televised Violence

Besides the violent TV program being mediated, four additional clips of violent TV shows were shown to children in the experiment. This is to ensure that when examining parental moral mediation’s relationship with children’s orientation toward televised violence, the relationship is independent of the experimental manipulations. Also, given that the mediated TV content included only justified violence, the four clips allowed a more complete representation of televised violence portrayals. Basically, this was done to ensure that the findings are more generalizable.

The four clips of televised violence were edited from four different children’s TV shows. Among them, two were chosen to represent unjustified violence (Billy and Mandy\textsuperscript{15}, The Cramp Twins\textsuperscript{16}) and two to represent justified violence (Power

\textsuperscript{15} Billy and Mandy is a clip about a baby brother (Billy) who doesn’t want his older sister (Mandy) to leave him for the weekend. Billy pulled on Mandy’s shirt, cried, and begged Mandy to not leave. Mandy was frustrated so she end up slapping Billy in the face twice and told him to shut up.

\textsuperscript{16} The Cramp Twins is a clip about twins (Cramp Twins) who always want to be like their older brother (Cramp Brother). They tried to imitate him and ended up getting into a fight with another child. The twins ended up getting hurt and were told not to do it again.

67
The characters in the four clips were shown to use violence such as slapping, punching, kicking, and wrestling to solve problems.

Upon the completion of all questions designed for the mediated program, children were asked to direct their attention back to the TV screen. They were then given the four clips of televised violence to watch with an unjustified violence clip alternating with a justified violence clip. Each of the clips lasted from 30 seconds to 1 minute in length and no mediation was delivered during any viewing of the clips.

Immediately after each clip, children were asked to evaluate the violence by answering one question per clip. Evaluation questions such as, “was Mandy right to hit Billy” was used. The response options used were identical to the ones used in the rest of this study. After completing the evaluation question, children were then asked to proceed to the next clip.

One scale for the unjustified clip were created by averaging together two evaluations of the unjustified clips, $M = 1.2, SD = .51, r(201) = .39, p < .01$. Another scale for the justified clip were created by averaging together two evaluations of the justified clips, $M = 2.2, SD = .84, r(200) = .68, p < .01$.

**Manipulation Check**

Three questions were included toward the end of the survey as manipulation check to ascertain children’s comprehension of the moral mediation delivered in each of the conditions. Response options are consistent with the rest of measures.

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16 The Cramp Twins depicted of a conflict between one well-behaved brother (Lucien) and one ill-mannered brother (Wayne). Wayne wasn’t getting ready for some guests’ visit and was yelled at by his mom. Seeing that Lucien was all dressed and ready to go, Wayne got mad and punched Lucien on the shoulder for getting dressed first.

17 The Power Rangers SPD clip started with the Power Rangers playing football together. They were later interrupted by grey ninjas who stole their football. In order to get their football back, the Power Rangers and the ninjas broke into a fight. The clip ended with the Power Rangers retrieving back their stolen football.

18 The Power Ranger Mighty Morphin clip depicted fighting between the Power Rangers and the monsters who are destroying a city.
mentioned above. They are, “no”, “sort of”, and “yes” (coded as 1 through 3, respectively).

The first question was designed to measure children’s acceptance of judgment-only moral mediation by asking them whether the heroic characters were wrong from what they did in the show, \( M = 2.1, SD = .91 \). The second question measured children’s acceptance of consequence-based reasoning mediation by asking if they agree that it’s wrong to fight as means of solving a problem because they can get themselves hurt, \( M = 1.9, SD = .92 \). The third question assessed children’s acceptance of motive-based reasoning mediation. They were asked if they agree that it is wrong for one of the characters (i.e. Turbine) to fight just because he wants people to listen to them, \( M = 2.0, SD = .95 \). See table 1 for means of all manipulation check items by conditions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Manip. Check</th>
<th>Judgment-only</th>
<th>Consequence-based</th>
<th>Motive-based</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( M (SD) )</td>
<td>( M (SD) )</td>
<td>( M (SD) )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judgment-only</td>
<td>2.34 (.92)</td>
<td>2.06 (.94)</td>
<td>1.94 (.98)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consequence</td>
<td>2.16 (.90)</td>
<td>2.18 (.93)</td>
<td>2.14 (.92)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motive</td>
<td>2.28 (.83)</td>
<td>1.82 (.87)</td>
<td>1.92 (.97)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>1.62 (.91)</td>
<td>1.65 (.86)</td>
<td>1.86 (.95)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Mean Scores of the Manipulation Check Items by Condition

Comparisons among the conditions’ responses for each of the manipulation checks were made using contrast coefficients which allow comparisons between weighted combinations of condition means. The comparisons revealed that children in the judgment-only condition were significantly more likely to agree that a heroic
character (i.e., Lobo) in the show was wrong to wrestle the villains, $M = 2.3$, $SD = .92$, than children in the other three conditions; $t(197) = 2.3$, $p < .05$. Contrast coefficient comparing consequence-based reasoning condition with the rest of the conditions also revealed that children receiving consequence-based reasoning messages were significantly more likely to agree that Maria was wrong to hit people in the show because she got herself hurt, $M = 2.3$, $SD = .92$, than children in the other three conditions; $t(196) = 2.3$, $p < .05$. Lastly, comparison revealed that motive-based reasoning mediation did not influence children’s reasoning of the character’s violent behavior seen on TV. There were no significant differences between responses from children in the motive-based reasoning condition versus the other three conditions; $t(197) = 0.4$, $p = .70$.

**Moral Reasoning Coding Scheme**

Children’s reasons for their evaluation of the mediated content were coded according to a revised version of Krcmar and Valkenburg’s (1999) coding scheme for the Moral Interpretations of Interpersonal Violence (MIIV) scale. The MIIV scale was developed to measure children’s moral reasoning in story scenarios that mirror televised violent situations.

The MIIV scale requires that children listen and respond to stories in which main characters used violence to solve problems. Children were asked to first evaluate realistic story scenarios such as stealing, kicking, and beating someone up and then provide explanations for their evaluations. The explanations were coded using a six-category scheme that ranged from immature reasoning (e.g., stereotypical reasoning) to mature reasoning (e.g., perspective taking/motive based)\textsuperscript{19}.

\textsuperscript{19} The six categories of MIIV coding scheme are: (1) authority/punishment, (2) stereotypical reasoning, (3) hedonism, (4) needs-oriented, (5) perspective taking/affectional relationship concern with humanness empathic/motive-based, (6) human rights (Krcmar & Valkenburg, 1999, p.621).
Coding scheme. Instead of using the original six-category coding scheme, this study added one more category to make a seven-category coding scheme. Except revisions on two categories, the label and definition of the other categories stayed intact in relation to the MIIIV scale with higher categories indicating the use of more advanced reasoning strategies and lower categories indicating the use of less advanced reasoning strategies. The first revision was made to the “hedonistic reasoning” category by re-labeling it as “reciprocity reasoning”. The second revision was done by inserting a new category, the alternative solution category, in between motive-based reasoning and human rights category. Since the MIIIV scheme was developed to code children’s response toward story scenarios of realistic interpersonal violence rather than televised fictional interpersonal violence, the changes were done so children’s reasoning for judgment towards televised interpersonal violence can be better captured.

According to past moral developmental research, both hedonistic and reciprocity reasoning have been combined into one category—theonistic reasoning (Eisenberg, 1986). They reflect the use of Kohlberg’s stage-2 reasoning in which children can’t consider the interest of others. The shared underlying mechanism functions with a focus on one’s immediate self and one’s limitation to take the perspectives of others. Although “hedonistic reasoning” has been used as the general label for both hedonistic and reciprocity reasoning in existing reasoning coding schemes (Eisenberg, 1986, Krcmar & Valkenberg, 1999), children in this current study who demonstrated reasoning strategies of Kohlberg’s stage-2 moral reasoning were found to use reciprocity reasoning instead of hedonistic reasoning. Consequently, to better

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Hedonistic reasoning refers to reasons that consider only the benefit of one self. In the context of prosocial dilemma, children reason hedonistically when their decision to assist or not to assist rest upon the gain to oneself. For example, “I wouldn’t help because I might be hungry” (Eisenberg-Berg, 1979). Similar to hedonism, consideration for oneself is still in action behind reciprocity reasoning. However, it presents itself in the form of fairness and justice to self rather than benefit for self.
represent this current data, any reasoning reflecting the use of stage-2 reasoning was re-labeled from hedonistic reasoning to reciprocity reasoning.\footnote{While hedonism and reciprocity reasoning are theoretically in common, empirically, not all moral scenarios elicit the use of both reasoning types. According to Eisenberg (1986), different moral scenarios have different emphasis. For example, prosocial dilemmas are central in altruistic considerations while Kohlberg’s (1984) moral dilemmas are central in value of life or issues such as authority, property, and contract. Prosical dilemmas elicit reasoning with emphasis more on the welfare of others while moral dilemmas identify issues of justice and fairness. This suggests that the criteria children use for their reasoning strategies may be somewhat content specific. Since televised violence mainly covers antisocial themes such as revenge or restitution rather than prosocial themes such as assisting and giving, it is likely that the difference in context would yield children’s use of one reasoning type rather the other. In other words, when evaluating televised violence, children who reason at the level of hedonistic reasoning when given a prosocial dilemma would reason using reciprocity reasoning instead.}

A second revision done based on the MIIV coding scheme was an addition of a seventh category. As mentioned in footnote 10, with the change of moral reasoning context, different levels of reasoning were found to manifest through new types of reasoning category. This is not only the case for children using less advanced moral reasoning (i.e., reciprocity reasoning versus hedonistic reasoning) but also the case for children using more advanced moral reasoning.

Children in this study who showed the ability to reason at a mature level not only provided reasons that fall into categories identified in the past such as needs-oriented reasoning, motive-based reasoning, and human rights reasoning, some also provided reasons that suggest the use of alternative solutions for violence as means of solving the interpersonal conflict. In fact, the mentioning of alternative solution as reasons for evaluation was found across conditions. Earlier studies also found similar results. Berndt and Berndt’s (1975) study on children’s use of motives and intentionality in moral judgment found that 10% of the children pointed out things the actor should have done instead of fighting as their reasons for their evaluation. Although not specifically stated, it was also assumed in their study that children’s use of alternative solution was a manifestation of higher level of moral reasoning.
Alternative solution is categorized in this study to be a more advanced level of moral reasoning because it demonstrates not only children’s considerations of intention to fight but also the awareness of fighting as means of solution to a problem. By providing other solutions than the salient violent behavior depicted on TV, children demonstrated their ability to think outside of the situation and consider multiple sources of information and complex perspectives.

With the two revisions mentioned above, a seven-category coding scheme was constructed for this study. They include: (1) punishment/authority reasoning, (2) stereotyped reasoning, (3) reciprocity reasoning, (4) needs-oriented reasoning, (5) motive-based reasoning, (6) alternative solution, (7) human rights (See Appendix D for category definitions, examples, and the decision rules associated with the categories).

**Coding.** To ensure intercoder reliabilities, the principal investigator first coded all responses using the established coding scheme. Later, a randomly selected sample of 25% of the responses was coded independently by another female graduate student who was blind to the experimental conditions. The reliability for the three open-ended questions regarding the three segments of mediated content was good ($\pi = .92, .86, .83$, respectively).

Upon the completion of coding, the coded categories for each clips viewed were then used to create a composite score of children’s moral reasoning toward the three segments of mediated content during the manipulation. The higher the number the more advanced the reasoning strategies are.

The composite score was created by combining children’s nominal responses to the three segments together. Cross tabulations between responses toward the three segments were obtained to investigate whether it is statistically appropriate to
combine. Since the contingency statistics were significant\textsuperscript{22}, it suggests that children tend to use similar reasoning strategies to each of the three segments viewed. Consequently, a composite score for children’s moral reasoning responses were computed. This procedure has been used in several of media effects research on developmental differences (Krcmar & Valkenberg, 1999; Krcmar & Curtis, 2003).

\textsuperscript{22} The contingency statistics for each of the clips analyzed are: mediated clip 1 and clip 2 (Cramer’s $V = .37$, $p < .01$), mediated clip 1 and clip 3 (Cramer’s $V = .34$, $p < .01$), and mediated clip 2 and clip 3 (Cramer’s $V = .46$, $p < .01$).
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Five attitudinal measurements were used as dependent variables in the analyses for hypothesis 1, 2, and 4 to gauge moral mediation’s effectiveness in mitigating children’s violence-prone attitudes. Past mediation studies have used program evaluation, attitude towards characters, justification for violence, desirability to imitate, and aggressive tendencies as indicators of children’s attitudinal orientation toward mediated content (Nathanson & Cantor, 2000; Nathanson & Yang, 2003). Likewise, they have been adopted in this study as measurement for the effectiveness of moral mediation.

Since gender and viewing experience were suggested in past research (Nathanson & Cantor, 2000; Nathanson & Yang, 2003; Nathanson, 2004) to influence mediation results, they were entered in a correlation analysis along with the independent and dependent variables used in hypothesis 1, 2, and 4 to test for possible correlation. This can increase the precision of each hypothesis testing and also to rule out alternative explanations. Both gender and viewing experience were found to be significantly correlated with four of the five dependent variables (i.e., program evaluation, attitude towards characters justification for violence, and desirability to imitate). Therefore, as means to avoid potential sources of spuriousness and to decrease error variance, both gender and viewing experience were entered as covariates in analysis for hypothesis 1, 2, and 4.
Data Analysis of Hypothesis 1

Hypothesis 1 predicted that children who were in the judgment-with-reasoning mediation group will have more negative orientation toward the mediated content than children who were in the judgment-only group. In other words, children who have received mediation messages that only evaluated the program content but did not provide explanations for the evaluation are predicted to have more positive attitudes toward the program, the characters, and the violence. They are also predicted to be more willing to imitate the characters and to have higher post-viewing aggressive tendencies.

In order to test for hypothesis 1, focused contrasts were used to compare between judgment-with-reasoning group and judgment-only group on the five attitudinal measurements. Since consequence-based and the motive-based moral mediation conditions were both conceptualized as judgment-with-reasoning moral mediation, contrast coefficients were set up so that the combination of consequence-based and motive-based condition’s group means can be compared with judgment-only condition’s group mean on each dependent variable. The coefficients assigned to judgment-only, consequence-based, and motive based condition are 2, -1, and -1 respectively. As for the control group, it was given a coefficient of zero. Gender and viewing experience were entered as covariates.

Comparisons using contrast coefficients between the mediation conditions were significant for all but one dependent variable. Compared to children in the judgment-only group, children in the judgment-with-reasoning groups (i.e., consequence-based and motive-based mediation condition) had more positive evaluation of the mediated program (adjusted $M = 2.15$ vs. $2.39$, $F(1, 187) = 4.71$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .02$), had more positive attitude towards the characters (adjusted $M = 76$ vs.
1.80 vs. 2.13, $F(1, 186) = 12.14, p < .001, \eta^2 = .05$), evaluated the violence as more justified (adjusted $M = 1.37$ vs. 1.59, $F(1, 187) = 5.44, p < .05, \eta^2 = .01$), and were more likely to want to imitate the characters’ behaviors (adjusted $M = 1.69$ vs. 1.99, $F(1, 187) = 5.14, p < .05, \eta^2 = .02$). There were no significant difference between the aggressive scores of children in the judgment-only condition and the judgment-with-reasoning conditions, $F(1, 187) = .21, p = .65$.

Although there were significant relationship between moral reasoning manipulations and four of the five attitudinal measurements, the results were not as expected. Specifically, higher positive responses were found from the judgment-with-reasoning condition rather than the judgment-only condition. Therefore, hypothesis 1 was not supported. Table 2 summarizes each condition’s adjusted means on the five attitudinal measurements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Judgment-only mediation</th>
<th>Consequence-based mediation</th>
<th>Motive-based mediation</th>
<th>No mediation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Program evaluation</td>
<td>2.15</td>
<td>2.39</td>
<td>2.40</td>
<td>2.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character evaluation</td>
<td>1.80</td>
<td>2.12</td>
<td>2.15</td>
<td>2.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violence justification</td>
<td>1.37</td>
<td>1.49</td>
<td>1.68</td>
<td>2.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desirability to imitate</td>
<td>1.69</td>
<td>1.86</td>
<td>2.12</td>
<td>2.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggressive tendencies</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>1.34</td>
<td>1.35</td>
<td>1.40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: The Adjusted Means of Children’s Orientations to Mediated Content by Moral Mediation Conditions
Data Analysis of Hypothesis 2

Hypothesis 2 predicted that the effect of moral mediation will depend on the age of the child, such that consequence-based mediation will be more effective than motive-based mediation for younger children and motive-based mediation will be more effective than consequence-based mediation for older children. Since a specific interaction effect was predicted by singling out two of the four mediation conditions in this study design, interaction contrasts were conducted.

According to Keppel (1991), interaction contrasts are a common type of interaction comparison created when specific levels of an independent variable in a factorial design are singled out for analysis. In the case of hypothesis 2, since two levels of the moral mediation manipulations (i.e., consequence-based mediation and motive-based mediation) were singled out from other mediation manipulations to have interaction with children’s age, a pairwise interaction contrasts were created to test for the prediction.

As mentioned earlier, the five attitudinal measurements were used as indicators of mediation effectiveness and child participants’ gender and viewing experience were entered as control variables for more precise estimates.

The result for interaction contrasts revealed no significant interaction between children’s age and mediation condition among any of the five dependent variables: program evaluation, \( F(1, 189) = .69, p = .41 \), character evaluation, \( F(1, 188) = .00, p = .96 \), violence justification, \( F(1, 189) = .05, p = .82 \), desirability to imitate, \( F(1, 189) = .25, p = .62 \), and aggressive tendencies, \( F(1, 189) = .84, p = .36 \). Therefore, the hypothesis was not supported. See Table 3 for adjusted means.
Table 3: The Adjusted Means of Children’s Orientations to Mediated Content by Judgment-with-reasoning Mediation Conditions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Program evaluation</th>
<th>Character evaluation</th>
<th>Violence justification</th>
<th>Desirability to imitate</th>
<th>Aggressive tendencies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Younger Conseq.</td>
<td>2.45</td>
<td>2.18</td>
<td>1.37</td>
<td>1.77</td>
<td>1.35</td>
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<tr>
<td>Younger Motive</td>
<td>2.56</td>
<td>2.21</td>
<td>1.58</td>
<td>1.98</td>
<td>1.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older Conseq.</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>2.04</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>1.93</td>
<td>1.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older Motive</td>
<td>2.20</td>
<td>2.08</td>
<td>1.76</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>1.43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Analysis of Hypothesis 3

Hypothesis 3 predicted that children receiving judgment-with-reasoning moral mediation will provide more advanced moral reasoning for their evaluation of televised violence than children receiving judgment-only moral mediation. That is, there would be an effect of condition on children’s reasoning regarding the content they viewed.

First, children’s open-ended responses regarding the mediated content were examined to obtain an initial idea of the data. Children’s reasons for evaluation were crosstabulated with the mediations conditions. In Table 4, categories of moral reasoning were organized with less advanced moral reasoning (authority/punishment) at the top and more advanced moral reasoning at the bottom (human rights). Percentages in the table were taken from the total number of children who provided certain reasoning type (e.g., stereotypical reasoning) given any segment of the mediated content. This has been used in previous moral reasoning studies (Krcmar & Curtis, 2003) to compare different groups’ use of different reasoning strategies.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Judgment-only</th>
<th>Judgment-with-reasoning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Consequence-based</td>
<td>Motive-based</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punishment/Authority</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stereotyped Reasoning</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reciprocity Reasoning</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needs-oriented Reasoning</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motive-based Reasoning</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Solution</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Rights</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Percentages in each of the mediation conditions of the table are taken from the total number of children.

Table 4: Percentage of Moral Reasoning Types by Moral Mediation Conditions

As presented in table 4, children exposed to judgment-only mediation messages showed more frequent use of lower moral reasoning strategies. This is especially true for the use of stereotypical reasoning among the judgment-only group. Fifty-six percent of the reasoning provided from the judgment-only condition was stereotypical reasoning while only around 33% to 35% for the judgment-with-reasoning conditions.

Conversely, children exposed to judgment-with-reasoning group engaged more frequently in the use of higher moral reasoning strategies. Specifically, of the judgment-with-reasoning conditions, 44% of the responses in motive-based condition and 30% of the responses in consequence-based condition were needs-oriented.
reasoning while only 17% of the responses in judgment-only condition were
needs-oriented.

Since a chi-square test on Table 3 can only test the vague null hypothesis of
equality of the distribution of responses across all three conditions rather than a more
specific comparison as described in H3, instead of conducting a chi-square analysis
on the full table, a 2 x 2 table was created to allow a more focused analysis for H3
(Table 5). First, consequence-based condition and motive-based condition were
recoded into one variable to make comparison between judgment-only and
judgment-with-reasoning condition possible.

Second, moral reasoning categories were collapsed into two categories
representing low and high moral reasoning. Stereotyped and reciprocity reasoning
were coded as low moral reasoning and needs-oriented and motive based moral
reasoning were coded as high moral reasoning. Studies have shown that focusing on
psychological aspect of individuals to be indicators of more advanced moral
reasoning (Gibbs, 2003; Krcmar & Cooke, 2001); therefore, needs-oriented reasoning
that mention physical safety or pain (e.g., “he can get himself hurt”) and motive-based
reasoning that show the consideration of other’s emotions and thoughts, (e.g.,
“because she was mad”) were coded as more advanced moral reasoning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Judgment-only</th>
<th>Judgment-with-reasoning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Percentage of Low and High Moral Reasoning by Moral Mediation
Conditions
Chi-square analysis showed that children receiving judgment-only moral mediation used more lower moral reasoning strategies (73%) for their evaluation of televised violence than children receiving judgment-with-reasoning moral mediation (50%), $\chi^2(1) = 20.10, p < .001$. Therefore, H3 was supported.

Data Analysis of Hypothesis 4

Hypothesis 4 predicted that parents’ report of their moral mediation behaviors will be associated with children’s negative orientation toward viewed content. In order to test this hypothesis, two sets of dependent variables were used in representation of negative orientation toward televised violence. First, the five dependent variables used in hypothesis 1 and 2 were used again in this test. Second, children’s evaluations for the unjustified and justified televised interpersonal violence were also used as dependent variables to better rule out mediation manipulation as an alternative explanation.

To test this hypothesis, a hierarchical regression equation was built for each dependent variable. First, gender, viewing experience, and experimental conditions (condition 1 = judgment-only, condition 2 = consequence-based, condition 3 = motive-based) were entered as control variables on the first step. Then, the four sub-scales of parental moral mediation (i.e., judgment-only moral mediation, consequence-based moral mediation, motive-based moral mediation, and general moral mediation) were entered on the second step of the equation (See table 6).
Boys coded as 1 and girls coded as 2. All betas are standardized. Betas reported at the second step reflect the relationship between the different contents viewed and the different types of parental mediation while controlling for all of the variables entered on the first step.

Table 6: Regression Analyses Predicting Justification of Televised Violence

Analysis results revealed that of all of the dependent variables tested, parental moral mediation was only significantly related with children’s evaluation of the unjustified TV violence and children’s evaluation of the justified TV violence. More specifically, parental consequence-based moral mediation was significantly associated with children’s evaluation of violence for both unjustified and justified TV violence viewed after the experimental manipulation ($\beta = -.25, p < .05; \beta = -.43, p < .05$, respectively). These significant results suggest that the more parents engage in
consequence-based moral mediation, the less acceptable the children will think televised violence is.

As for parental motive-based moral mediation, it was significantly related with the children’s evaluation of justified televised violence ($\beta = .50, p < .01$) but not with children’s evaluation of unjustified violence. This means, the more parents engage in mediation with motive-based reasoning, the more permissive attitude children will have towards justified televised violence.
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The present study was done to examine moral mediation’s effectiveness in intervening television’s negative influence on children. Specifically, the immediate influence and parental influence of moral mediation on children were examined. Operationally, moral mediation was refined into three types — judgment-only, consequence-based, and motive-based mediation— to better identify which type can mitigate violent TV’s negative effects most effectively. The effects measured in this study were children’s post-viewing attitudes and moral reasoning toward televised violence.

First, in regards to children’s post-viewing responses, this study explored how the absence (judgment-only mediation) and presence (consequence-based and motive-based mediation) of reasoning in mediation affect children’s attitudes toward the mediated violent show. Second, children’s age was examined as possible moderator for moral mediation’s effect on children’s post-viewing attitudes. Particularly, the focus was to search for possible developmental differences in children’s understanding of moral mediation with emphasis in violence consequences versus violence motivation. Third, relationship between moral mediation and children’s use of moral reasoning types as justification for their judgment of televised violence were explored. Lastly, to identify moral mediation’s effect outside of the
experimental environment, parental moral mediation was examined in relation to children’s post-viewing attitudes and moral reasoning on televised violence.

Overall, the results suggested that any type of moral reasoning tested in this study was conducive to decreasing children’s positive attitudes toward televised violence. However, judgment-with-reasoning mediation was more likely to be effective when used in a home environment by parents. When it comes to enhancing children’s use of advanced moral reasoning, both experimental data and parental data revealed that moral mediation that supplemented judgment with a reasoning or explanation was more effective than moral mediation without reasoning.

Moral Mediation on Mitigating Positive Attitudes toward Violent TV

Contrary to hypothesis 1’s prediction, children receiving judgment-with-reasoning mediation did not yield more negative orientations toward the mediated content than children receiving judgment-only mediation. This suggested that the immediate effectiveness of judgment-only mediation was better than judgment-with-reasoning mediation when it comes to lowering children’s positive attitudes toward violent TV.

There are two explanations for this finding. First, it is possible that judgment-only mediation was easier to process than judgment-with-reasoning mediation. Perhaps judgment-only mediation required less cognitive effort while judgment-with-reasoning mediation required more effort. Therefore, when children’s attitudes were measured immediately after the exposure, judgment-only mediation was better at reinforcing the negative attitudes. If this is the case, how is judgment-only mediation less cognitively taxing than judgment-with-reasoning mediation? There are three possible explanations for this.
First, the repetition that fighting is undesirable in the judgment-only condition reinforced the processing of the message. In the judgment-only group, children were told that the hero was wrong to fight the villains and that fighting is wrong. As for the judgment-with-reasoning group, children were told that the heroes were wrong to fight because they could get themselves hurt or get themselves into trouble. In order to make the length of each mediation message comparable to each other, during the time judgment-with-reasoning messages were spent explaining why the heroes’ violent behaviors were wrong, the judgment-only messages were spent repeating the undesirability of the violent behavior. It is possible that the repetition of one single concept in the judgment-only message reinforced the children’s attitude; hence making it harder for them to ignore and easier to process.

Second, children’s possible familiarity with the judgment-only mediation made it less cognitive taxing. It is very likely that the “fighting is wrong” concept had already been ingrained in children by various socializing agents (i.e., parents or teachers) outside of the viewing context throughout their course of development. If this was the case, judgment-only mediation was only priming children’s existing cognitive structure and reinforcing it rather than introducing them a new one. Consequently, it took children shorter time to comprehend the judgment-only mediation and therefore easier for them to apply the mediation to the program.

Third, besides the repetition and the familiarity of the message, the lack of moral reasoning in the message also made it less cognitive taxing. According to Krcmar and Curtis (2003), for children, judgment is a more automatic process than reasoning because reasoning requires more steps in cognitive processing. In order to understand reasoning, one needs to first comprehend and than assess the scenario. Since children in the judgment-only condition were only presented with negative judgment, no
additional cognitive effort was needed to understand why the characters were judged as wrong. As for children in the judgment-with-reasoning conditions, they were exposed to reasoning messages that required them to not only negate but also morally scrutinize the violent behaviors of the heroes (e.g., she was wrong because she got herself into trouble). The act of engaging in moral reasoning could have exhausted children’s processing resources and left them with fewer resources to apply the same reasoning to the program.

Aside from the fact that engaging in moral reasoning is more cognitively taxing, processing reasoning that is conflicting to that of one’s existing mental models can be dissonance inducing and cognitive taxing as well. By arguing that the heroes were wrong to fight because they can hurt themselves or because they have the wrong motivation puts children in a situation of cognitive dissonance or cognitive disequilibrium. According to cognitive developmentalists (e.g., Kolhberg, 1984), the experience of resolving cognitive disequilibrium by reorganizing existing cognitive structure can result in profound shift of attitudes and moral orientation. However, this also meant higher demand for cognitive efforts.

How are the judgment-with-reasoning messages presented in this study conflicting with children’s existing attitudes? As suggested by Krcmar and Curtis (2003), children exposed to justified violence are automatically activated with mental models of justified violence. Studies have demonstrated that televised violence expose children to violent themes that can create schemas in which violence is approved as an effective way of problem solving-- for example, violence that goes unpunished, violence that is executed by attractive heroes on unattractive villains, and violence that result in no consequences (Wilson et al., 2002). Regardless of whether the
justified violence is for self-protection or restitution, it can activate permissive moral models of violent behaviors (Krcmar & Curtis, 2003).

Similarly, in this study, prior to the exposure to any forms of mediation, children’s permissive moral models were automatically activated when presented with Los Luchadores’ justified violent content. In fact, of the four conditions in this study, children in the no mediation condition had the most positive evaluation of the violent characters, judged the violence to be most acceptable, and showed highest desirability to imitate the action heroes.

If televised violence activates children’s permissive moral models, presenting judgment-with-reasoning mediation messages after the exposure is challenging their permissive attitudes with a conflicting argument. Instead of the televised justification for violence such as self-protection or restitution, children’s were presented with arguments that stressed the undesirability of violence due to consequence-related or motivational reasons. For example, the consequence-based mediation argued that the behavior was wrong because acting violently can get one’s self hurt or in trouble. Given the conflicting message, cognitive disequilibrium arises and more cognitive efforts are needed for processing.

The other possible explanation for hypothesis 1’s unexpected finding is related with the experimental setting of this study. Given that the nature of experimental study only allows observation on mediation’s immediate effect on children, perhaps one exposure of judgment-with-reasoning mediation is not enough. Maybe judgment-with-reasoning mediation is more effective than judgment-only mediation not for an immediate effect but for a long-term effect.

Recall the theoretical explication behind hypothesis 1. It was argued that reasoning provided along with judgments is helpful in the internalization process of
values and attitudes. Consequently, judgment-with-reasoning mediation should yield more negative orientation toward TV content from children than judgment-only mediation. It was also argued that perhaps judgment-with-reasoning mediation provides more conflicting or new information to children than the judgment-only mediation that children’s need to resolve their cognitive disequilibrium will facilitate the adoption of the new information.

Although theories on internalization and disequilibrium did suggest the importance of providing reasons when justifying judgments with children, they are generally used to predict parenting or teaching effects that are cumulative or long-term. As a result, it is possible that judgment-with-reasoning mediation will be more successful when used over time.

In fact, results found in McCann and Prentice’s (1981) study supports this argument. In their study, they compared the effectiveness of two conditions’ influence in promoting change in children’s moral judgment. The two conditions were direct reinforcement group and cognitive disequilibrium group. For the direct reinforcement group, children were given models who judged moral dilemmas without provisions of reasons (similar to the judgment-only group used in this study). As for the cognitive disequilibrium group, children were exposed to models that used moral reasoning more advanced than their developmental level for judging moral dilemmas (similar to the judgment-with-reasoning groups used in this study).

They found that while the direct reinforcement group was most effective in promoting change in children’s moral judgment immediately after the manipulation, the cognitive disequilibrium group was more enduring and generalized. That is, children exposed with challenging reasoning were able to demonstrate change in attitude or moral standard even two weeks after the experiment. They reasoned that
children in the direct reinforcement group only demonstrated a superficial change of attitude in response to modeling and reinforcement contingencies while the cognitive disequilibrium group demonstrated a more profound and lasting change in moral reasoning.

Likewise, a similar argument can be made for hypothesis 1’s result. Instead of jumping to conclusion that judgment-only mediation is better than judgment-with-reasoning mediation, perhaps it is more logical to say that judgment-only mediation can yield better immediate responses from children but judgment-with-reasoning mediation can foster long-term and internalized attitudes. In other words, although the study result is suggesting that the provision of rationale in moral mediation did not increase the messages’ effectiveness in mitigating violent TV’s influence on children, by no means is it suggesting that they are totally ineffective.

In fact, post hoc analysis comparing judgment-with-reasoning mediation with no mediation revealed that it is still effective in decreasing children’s positive attitudes toward violent TV. By considering how each moral mediation type performed in relation to no mediation, one can interpret whether particular strategy increased or decreased children’s vulnerability to violent TV (i.e., post-viewing attitudinal scores). Although judgment-with-reasoning mediation wasn’t as effective as judgment-only mediation for children’s immediate responses, results showed that it can still significantly decrease their positive attitudes. Post hoc analysis revealed that children in the judgment-with-reasoning conditions had significantly fewer positive attitudes toward the violent characters, thought the violence was less justified, and were less likely to want to imitate the violent characters than children in the no mediation condition. As a result, moral mediation that supplements negative judgments toward
televised violence with rationale or justifications can still decrease children’s vulnerability toward violent shows.\(^{23}\)

Hypothesis 2 predicted that developmental differences exist in the effectiveness of the consequence-based and motive-based mediation. Since both consequence-based and motive-based mediation had messages that included judgment and reasoning, the purpose of hypothesis 2 was to explore which type of reasoning, provided through mediation, would yield better outcomes from children of different age groups. Specifically, it was hypothesized that consequence-based mediation will be more effective than motive-based mediation for younger children and motive-based mediation will be more effective than consequence-based mediation for older children. However, this hypothesis was not supported in this study, because no developmental differences were found.

Although it seemed logical to predict that younger children in this study will benefit more from consequence-based mediation than motive-based, there are several reasons why the results obtained were not in the predicted direction. First, it is possible that age is simply the surrogate of children’s cognitive development for testing interaction between moral mediation and children moral reasoning. Perhaps in order to fully test the influence of cognitive and moral development on children’s application of moral mediation on evaluating violent TV, an actual measure of cognitive development and moral reasoning is necessary.

\(^{23}\) To test whether judgment-only strategy and judgment-with-reasoning strategy have increased or decreased children’s vulnerability to violent TV, contrast analysis procedure used in H1 were used again as post hoc analysis. Judgment-with-reasoning conditions (consequence-based and motive-based) were compared with no mediation condition on the five variables. Three out of the five variables were significant, attitude toward characters, \(F(1,188) = 6.8, p < .01\); justification of violence, \(F(1,189) = 139.7, p < .001\); and desirability to imitate characters, \(F(1,189) = 9.7, p < .01\). Comparison between judgment-only condition and no mediation condition were significant for all but one dependent variable, attitude toward viewed program, \(F(1,189) = 5.7, p < .01\); attitude toward characters, \(F(1,188) = 27.7, p < .001\); justification of violence, \(F(1,189) = 146.4, p < .001\); and desirability to imitate characters, \(F(1,189) = 22.0, p < .001\).
Second, it is likely that the design of the consequence-based mediation message was not sensitive enough to distinguish between younger and older children’s developmental differences; therefore, no differences in mediation effectiveness were found. Although past research has found that younger children tend to judge TV violence according to negative consequences such as immediate punishment (Krcmar & Cooke, 2001), they were presented with shows that portrayed obvious negative consequences that were easy for children to identify with and did not require advanced abilities such as perspective-taking or inference to understand. Given the explicit portrayal of violent consequences, younger children who had yet to develop advanced moral reasoning and cognitive ability to infer or perspective-take could still reason based on the eminent negative consequences.

For many past experimental studies on children’s moral reasoning, stories and TV dramas were edited to include explicit description or portrayal of consequences. However, for the present study and many fantasy violence shows made for children, violent consequences were not explicitly portrayed (Wilson et al, 2002). Although with the consequence-based mediation, children’s attention was directed to the negative consequences of the violence, it was only implicitly portrayed in the show. In some cases where no negative consequences were depicted, mediation could only verbally present the idea to the children.

If the reasoning in consequence-based mediation required children to either make inferences or to imagine the occurrence of an undesirable consequence rather than directing their attention to an obvious pictorial portrayal, they would need more advanced cognitive reasoning ability in order to comprehend the consequences. Abilities such as perspective-taking would be needed to foresee that fighting can get someone into trouble or get someone physically hurt.
If inferences or perspective-taking were necessary for even the understanding of a consequence-based mediation message, it is likely that the same cognitive reasoning ability needed to understand abstract message such as motive-based mediation message is needed to process consequence-based mediation message. If both types of message required similar reasoning ability, it is understandable why no developmental differences were observed in the effectiveness of the two types of mediation message.

This issue introduced a question that needs further verification by future mediation research: is it true that since fantasy violence for children has the tendency to avoid contextual features that can help children to view TV violence more critically, any moral mediation that redirects children’s attention to the eliminated contextual features will inevitably require children to process the message with more advanced reasoning and cognition? If so, since the goal of moral mediation is to counteract television’s justified portrayal of violence by pointing out the missing or implicit contextual cues such as punishment of violence, consequences of violence, unacceptability of violence, and undesirability of perpetrator, perhaps children will be challenged to use more sophisticated cognitive abilities to understand the inferences made in the mediation message regardless of the reasoning type used in the mediation. Whether it is consequence-based or motive-based, as long as the mediation message includes judgment with some sort of reasoning, it presents children with a more sophisticated reasoning model that will require more cognitive ability to process and comprehend.

*Moral Mediation on Enhancing Advanced Moral Reasoning Strategies on Violent TV*

Hypothesis 3 predicted that since judgment-with-reasoning mediation directed children’s attention to consequences or motivations of a televised violence, it should
promote children to consider more features of violence and, consequently, teach them to use more advanced reasoning strategies as a basis for their evaluation compared to children in the judgment-only mediation group. Results suggest that when asked to evaluate televised violence, children receiving judgment-with-reasoning mediation did in fact demonstrate more use of advanced moral reasoning than children receiving judgment-only mediation. Also, children who received judgment-only messages demonstrated the use of lower level moral reasoning than children who received judgment-with-reasoning messages. These results highlight the fact that by expressing the undesirability of violence without explanation can encourage children to reason using less advanced moral reasoning rather than enhancing their use of more advanced reasoning.

One possible reason why the majority of the children in the judgment-only group provided less advanced reasoning in their explanation is because judgment-only mediation did not address why violence was judged as wrong. Nothing was done to encourage higher level reasoning such as taking the perspectives of others through understanding the consequences of violence or the motivation behind a violent act. According to Krcmar and Valkenburg (1999), televised violence enforces children to use less advanced moral reasoning through portraying justified violence with its lack of negative consequences to violence or lack of punishment. If children were already discouraged by violent TV to use less advanced reasoning strategy, exposing them with judgment-only mediation will not resolve the problem. Although they learned about the undesirability of violence through the negative judgment, without any reasoning for the judgment and discussion on negative consequences or punishments to the violence, nothing is done to promote perspective taking. Hence, children are less likely to use higher level moral reasoning strategies.
In fact, among the children in the judgment-only group, over half (57%) of the children reasoned their judgment using stereotypical reasoning and as high as 11% of them stated that they don’t know the reason to their judgment. Stereotypical reasoning is conceptualized as immature moral reasoning strategy because children reason their judgment choices by using words such as “should” without giving any reasons (Krcmar & Valkenburg, 1999). Furthermore, they reason by exhibiting tendencies to obey rules unquestioningly. Its only difference with punishment or authority avoidance reasoning is that they didn’t mention the rule enforcer like, “it is wrong, because you shouldn’t use violence” or “it is wrong, because he’s bad” (refer to Appendix D).

Interestingly, these stereotypical reasoning responses are similar to judgment-only mediation messages. Like stereotypical reasoning, judgment-only mediation did not engage children in moral reasoning. Instead, children were only given a simple judgment. Although it is easy to process for children, it also demonstrated to children how to interpret televised violence in line with the stereotypical reasoning. Although reasoning as such is already helping children to internalize rules regarding TV violence, the rules are only judgments without reasonings. Therefore, children are not made known to the relevant reasoning behind the rules. As a result, they are less likely to use character’s thoughts or feelings as basis for their judgments.

As discussed earlier in this study, sophisticated cognitive skills such as perspective taking or higher levels of moral reasoning can help children reduce their TV-induced aggressive attitudes or even help them internalize moral values. In other words, immature reasoning used for judgment of violence is not conducive to mitigating violent TV’s negative effects. Therefore, if the ultimate goal of moral
mediation is to reduce aggressive attitudes and internalize children with moral values
to condemn violence, the finding that judgment-only mediation encourages more use
of lower level reasoning beckons for special attention. The reasons are twofold.

First, since immature reasoning such as stereotypical reasoning have long been
used in the design of mediation message by experimental studies (Hicks, 1968;
Corder Bolz, 1980), this finding reminds future mediation research of the need to
avoid incorporating immature reasoning into mediation messages in case of the
backfiring effect among children’s moral development. If experimental studies are
finding successful immediate effects from mediation messages such as the
judgment-only mediation messages used in this study and parents are encouraged by
these studies to mediate violent TV contents accordingly, what would be the
outcomes for children when parents are cumulatively using judgment-only mediation
messages? The current result suggests that without providing appropriate reasoning as
basis for judgment, children will show tendencies to reason using only immature
moral reasoning.

Second, although mediation messages such as the ones used in judgment-only
mediation have found to be successful in decreasing children’s positive attitudes
toward violent TV (Corder-Bolz, 1980; Hicks, 1968), it has the drawback of hindering
children’s moral development. Therfore, future mediation research should be cautious
when considering the outcome effects of mediation. Outcome variables other than
aggressive attitudes, such as moral reasoning abilities, should be taken into
consideration.

Children in this study who are exposed to either consequence-based mediation or
motive-based mediation showed higher use of needs-oriented reasoning for their
judgment of the televised violence compared to children who are exposed to
judgment-only mediation. By using needs-oriented reasoning, these children have demonstrated their ability to perspective-take. Although their reasoning tends to stay at the level of physical needs, they are already showing the attempt to understand another person’s needs or even feelings. Since studies have found that viewing fantasy violence can lead to less advanced perspective taking and less advanced moral reasoning (Krcmar & Cooke, 2001; Krcmar & Valkenberg, 1999), the result that judgment-with-reasoning can elicit more use of advanced reasoning such as needs-oriented reasoning serves as an intervention to mitigate violent TV’s negative effect on children’s moral development.

The effectiveness of judgment-with-reasoning mediation also provides an alternative to judgment-only mediation. By providing reasoning that either focuses on the consequences of violence or motivation behind the violence, children who were originally primed by fantasy violence to use less advanced moral reasoning can be encouraged by mediation to reason with more advanced moral reasoning.

Again, this finding lends support to the importance of discussing consequences and motivation with children. With the right message, children will not only slowly develop negative attitude towards violent TV contents but also be encouraged and stimulated to use more advanced reasoning strategies.

**Parental Moral Mediation**

Although the first three hypotheses discussed above have demonstrated the significance of moral mediation and its immediate effects on children, critics often criticize that the immediate mediation effects observed within an experimental setting could only be the effects of social desirability (Nathanson, 2001). It is likely that when children reported their attitudes toward different aspects of violent TV, given the artificial laboratory setting, the presence of the adult experimental confederate,
and the controversial topic of TV violence, children will feel compelled to repeat back the same attitude delivered in the mediation message.

The fourth hypothesis in this study provided an opportunity to validate moral mediation’s effect beyond the experimental setting. It predicted that moral mediation used by parents at home is effective in mitigating TV’s negative effects on children through socializing attitudes and internalizing moral values.

Results show that certain parental moral mediation predicted not only a child’s perceived justification of the unjustified TV violence but also his/her justified TV violence viewed during the experiment. This suggested that parents’ report of their moral mediation usage is related to children’s moral evaluation regardless of the type of TV violence being viewed.

First, consequence-based parental mediation as reported by parents was found to relate negatively with children’s perceived justification of TV violence. That is, the more parents engage in consequence-based moral mediation the less children perceive the violence to be justified. This finding highlight the fact that parent-child discussion about the consequences of violence is effective in teaching children to think that violence is unacceptable. Furthermore, since children demonstrated negative judgment of TV violence even without the presence of their parents, it also suggested that frequent discussion of violent TV through consequence-based moral mediation can socialize negative attitude towards TV violence and internalize moral judgment towards TV violence as well.

This finding together with the results from the experiment demonstrated the effectiveness of consequence-based mediation in helping children to resist television’s negative influences on attitudes and on moral development. However, unlike consequence-based moral mediation, motive-based moral mediation as reported by
parents was found to relate positively with children’s perceived justification of TV violence. The more parents engage in mediation using motive-based reasoning, the more permissive attitudes the children have toward televised violence. One reason why this result is inconsistent with the hypothesis could be that the “motivation of violence” was not well conceptualized in this study.

Throughout this study, explaining the motivation behind televised violence has been argued to mitigate TV violence’s negative effect on children, but what type of motivation discussed in the mediation message would elicit effective outcomes was not clearly identified. Motivation for violence can range from self-defense, unintentional, revengeful, to instrumental. Different motivation would either justify the violence presented on TV or counteract the justification of violence. For example, studies found that children who were told that the motivation of violence being unintentional tend to perceive violence as less justified than children who were told the motivation to be intentional (Krcmar & Cooke, 2001).

Also, it is likely that self-defense justifies a violent act more so than instrumental motivation for violence such as getting people’s attention. In fact, the result of this study supports this argument. The motive-based mediation messages used for the experimental section of this study was able to decrease children’s perceived justification of violence compared to children in the no mediation group (see Table 1). Children were told by the motive-based mediation that behaving violently like what they saw on TV was wrong because the motivation of the violent character was to get other people’s attention or to make other people listen. This is suggesting that depending on how the motivation is explained to a child, it can either enhance or reduce permissible attitudes toward violence.
Therefore, the possible reason why parental motive-based moral mediation was more likely to yield more positive judgment towards violence is because when parent participants were asked how often they explain character motivation to their children, they were reporting their behaviors of explaining the self-defense or revengeful motivation as portrayed on TV rather than the instrumental motivation. Since studies found that most fantasy violence tend to portray justified violence, if parents only explained character motivation according to how it was portrayed on TV, they were not mediating television’s negative effect. Instead, their messages were simply assisting children’s comprehension of the program. To make it worse, parents might have reinforced the justified violence presented on TV rather than negating it. In that case, it is likely that children would continue to perceive the televised violence as justified. Perhaps when explaining the motivation of violent characters, parents should avoid focusing on the self-defense or revengeful motivation but focus on identifying motivations that are less desirable such as the ones used in the experimental section of this study. In addition, future research should identify specific motivation to parent participants in order to gather more accurate responses.

Limitations and Future Research

Besides several of the limitations already discussed, there are a couple more limitations that should be taken into consideration in future investigations of the effectiveness of moral mediation. First, the children in this study were recruited exclusively from an inner-city after-school program. Despite the balanced ratio in race (45% African-American and 43% Caucasian), the fact that these children attend after-school program suggests some commonalities in their parent-child relationship. These children’s parents might not have enough time to engage in shared activities with them and might not be as accessible to them as children who go home straight
after school. It is likely that this group of children share similarities in the amount of parental involvement they receive. Consequently, the findings of this study should only be generalized to children who spend time in after-school programs or day cares. Future studies should include children with different home-life situation in order to capture a more representative result.

Second, it is unclear whether the result of no developmental differences among the consequence-based and motive-based conditions was contingent to the television program being mediated or could be generalized to all violent programs for children. Future research should determine the generalizability of this study’s findings by testing the proposed moral mediation types on other violent television programs. Future research should also devote time to examine how portrayal of behavior consequences and character motivations in children’s violent TV shows affect how moral mediation messages can be structured.

Third, although the data from the parent participants provided evidence supporting moral mediation’s effectiveness outside of the experimental setting, they are still cross-sectional correlational data. There is a need for longitudinal research to test whether exposure to moral mediation messages such as consequence-based mediation or motive-based mediation in a home environment is causally related to children’s moral development and moral judgment.

Fourth, of the five dependent variables tested for children’s orientation toward TV content, only items measuring aggressive tendency failed to yield significant result with the mediation conditions. In fact, previous active mediation research using the same aggressive tendency scale also failed to find significant effect of mediation messages on children’s aggressive tendencies (Nathanson, 2004). Perhaps this suggest for a closer look at the aggressive tendency scale. It is likely that social desirability
masked the true aggressive attitude that aggressive tendency scale was designed to measure. Future research need to look into more recent media violence literature for better measurements of aggressive tendencies or attitudes. For example, studies have used scenarios about realistic interpersonal conflicts to measure individual’s aggressive thoughts, feelings, and behaviors (Bushman & Anderson, 2002; Krcmar & Valkenburg, 1999). Perhaps using scenarios worded in child-friendly language and using conflicts children can easily relate to could yield more accurate measurement of aggressive attitudes.

Fifth, regardless of the significant effect found from judgment-with-reasoning mediation messages, manipulation check indicated that children failed to understand motive-based mediation messages. It is possible that the motive-based mediation messages were too difficult for children to understand. The message requires children to pull themselves out of the fantasy violence context and consider moral reasoning in a more realistic setting. It counter argued TV violence’s justification of protecting the world or saving the victim by focusing the reasoning on subtle motives for violence. Since children were told that it’s wrong to fight for the purpose of getting other people’s attention or wanting others to obey, it is likely that they chose not to process the complicated counter argument and went with TV’s straight forward and more interesting justified violence that they are more familiar with. Future research should look into the possibility of designing simpler motive-based reasoning that can compete with the justified violence presented on TV.

Future research should also examine the effectiveness of motive-based mediation with different kinds of violent content to understand whether motive-based mediation is contingent to the type of violence being mediated. For example, maybe fantasy violence and realistic violence can yield different results. Given that motive-based
mediation directs children to reason in a more realistic setting, it is likely that more realistic portrayal of violence provides an easier context for children to understand motive-based mediation. Consequently, it makes motive-based mediation more likely to be effective in mitigating violent TV’s negative effects on children.

Lastly, although this study offered an initial insight into possible effectiveness of moral mediation, it also opened up questions regarding to violent television program’s direct influence on children’s moral reasoning. For example, nearly half of the children in the study who were not exposed to any mediation messages argued their judgment using stereotypical reasoning. Perhaps violent television programs have the tendency to elicit children’s use of lower level reasoning. More research should be conducted to understand what types of reasoning violent programs are most likely to elicit from children.

Taken together, this study used existing psychological theories to understand mediation’s effectiveness on children. Despite the limitations, the results in this study highlighted the need to mediate violent content through both judgment and reasoning. Simply by providing negative evaluation of the violence might be effective in changing children’s immediate attitude but by supporting the negative judgment with an explanation can elicit more desirable outcomes than just a change in attitude. Explanations such as ones that focus on behavior consequences and character motivations can decrease children’s positive orientation towards violent television programs and encourage them to use higher moral reasoning strategies. Parents are encouraged to engage in moral mediation that explains the reasoning behind evaluations for more effective results. Future research should continue to explore different types of moral mediation based on theoretical arguments.
For the following questions, please think about your child who gave you this survey. Please indicate the grade, age, and gender of this child:

Child’s grade _____  Child’s age _____  Child’s gender _____

In this survey, we are trying to learn more about what parents talk to their kids about TV.

For the next set of questions, rate how often you engage in each of the behaviors with your child.

1. **For action adventure programs (For Example, “Power Rangers”), how often do you...**

   a) Point out that some things characters do are right?  
   b) Point out that some things characters do are wrong?  
   c) Point out that some characters are good?  
   d) Point out that some characters are bad?  
   e) Point out the results of characters’ behaviors?  
   f) Explain the consequences of characters’ behaviors?  
   g) Encourage your child to think about the consequences of characters’ behaviors?  
   h) Identify the outcome of characters’ behaviors?  
   i) Point out the reasons behind character’s behaviors?  
   j) Encourage your child to think about the motivation behind the things characters do?  
   k) Explain the motives of characters?  
   l) Identify the intentions of characters?  
   m) Point out WHY some things characters do are right?  
   n) Point out WHY some things characters do are wrong?  
   o) Point out WHY some characters are good?  
   p) Point out WHY some characters are bad?
2. **For action cartoons (For Example “Power Puffs, Batman, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles”), how often do you...**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>We don’t watch those</th>
<th>never</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) Point out that some things characters do are right?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Point out that some things characters do are wrong?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Point out that some characters are good?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) Point out that some characters are bad?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e) Point out the results of characters’ behaviors?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f) Explain the consequences of characters’ behaviors?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g) Encourage your child to think about the consequences of characters’ behaviors?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h) Identify the outcome of characters’ behaviors?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i) Point out the reasons behind character’s behaviors?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j) Encourage your child to think about the motivation behind the things characters do?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k) Explain the motives of characters?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>l) Identify the intentions of characters?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m) Point out WHY some things characters do are right?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n) Point out WHY some things characters do are wrong?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o) Point out WHY some characters are good?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p) Point out WHY some characters are bad?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. **For classic cartoons (For Example “Bugs Bunny, Looney Tunes”), how often do you...**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>We don’t watch those</th>
<th>never</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) Point out that some things characters do are right?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Point out that some things characters do are wrong?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Point out that some characters are good?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) Point out that some characters are bad?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e) Point out the results of characters’ behaviors?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
f) Explain the consequences of characters’ behaviors? 0 1 2 3 4 5

g) Encourage your child to think about the consequences of characters’ behaviors? 0 1 2 3 4 5

h) Identify the outcome of characters’ behaviors? 0 1 2 3 4 5

i) Point out the reasons behind character’s behaviors? 0 1 2 3 4 5

j) Encourage your child to think about the motivation behind the things characters do? 0 1 2 3 4 5

k) Explain the motives of characters? 0 1 2 3 4 5

l) Identify the intentions of characters? 0 1 2 3 4 5

m) Point out WHY some things characters do are right? 0 1 2 3 4 5

n) Point out WHY some things characters do are wrong? 0 1 2 3 4 5

o) Point out WHY some characters are good? 0 1 2 3 4 5

p) Point out WHY some characters are bad? 0 1 2 3 4 5

Finally, we have a few questions about you:

4. What is your relationship with the child?
   _____Mother _____Father _____Grandmother _____Grandfather _____Other
   (Specify)

5. What was your age on your last birthday? _____

6. How much education have you received? (check one)
   _____8th grade or less _____some high school _____high school diploma
   _____some college _____college diploma _____some graduate school
   _____graduate degree (e.g., M.A., Ph.D., J.D.)

7. How would you describe your ethnicity? (check one)
   _____Caucasian _____Hispanic _____Asian _____Native American
   _____Black or African American _____Other

Thank you for your help!
APPENDIX B

CHILD SURVEY
Now I’d like you to answer some questions about the show you saw.

1. The name of the show you just saw is “Los Luchadores.” How many times have you seen “Los Luchadores” before?
   <ul>
   <li>Never</li>
   <li>A couple of times</li>
   <li>Lots of times</li>
   </ul>

2. Did you think “Los Luchadores” was a good show?
   <ul>
   <li>No</li>
   <li>Sort of</li>
   <li>Yes</li>
   </ul>

3. Did you think it’s a good thing to watch “Los Luchadores”?
   <ul>
   <li>No</li>
   <li>Sort of</li>
   <li>Yes</li>
   </ul>

4. Did you like this show?
   <ul>
   <li>No</li>
   <li>Sort of</li>
   <li>Yes</li>
   </ul>

5. Would you like to see this show again?
   <ul>
   <li>No</li>
   <li>Sort of</li>
   <li>Yes</li>
   </ul>

6. Did you think Turbine was a good person?
   <ul>
   <li>No</li>
   <li>Sort of</li>
   <li>Yes</li>
   </ul>

7. Did you think Turbine was a nice person?
   <ul>
   <li>No</li>
   <li>Sort of</li>
   <li>Yes</li>
   </ul>

8. Did you like Turbine in the show?
   <ul>
   <li>No</li>
   <li>Sort of</li>
   <li>Yes</li>
   </ul>

9. Did you think Turbine was mean?
   <ul>
   <li>No</li>
   <li>Sort of</li>
   <li>Yes</li>
   </ul>
10. Did you think Maria was a good person?
   No       Sort of       Yes

11. Did you think Maria was a nice person?
   No       Sort of       Yes

12. Did you like Maria in the show?
   No       Sort of       Yes

13. Did you think Maria was mean?
   No       Sort of       Yes

14. Did you think Lobo was a good person?
   No       Sort of       Yes

15. Did you think Lobo was a nice person?
   No       Sort of       Yes

16. Did you like Lobo in the show?
   No       Sort of       Yes

17. Did you think Lobo was mean?
   No       Sort of       Yes

18. Were you glad when Turbine throws fireballs at the Hula people?
   No       Sort of       Yes
19. Was Turbine right to throw fireballs at the Hula people?
   No       Sort of       Yes
   Why? __________________________________________________

20. Were you glad when Maria fought the Hula people?
   No       Sort of       Yes

21. Was Maria right to hit the Hula people?
   No       Sort of       Yes
   Why? __________________________________________________

22. Were you glad when Lobo fought the Hula people?
   No       Sort of       Yes

23. Was Lobo right to hit the Hula people?
   No       Sort of       Yes
   Why? __________________________________________________

24. Do you wish you could be like Turbine?
   No       Sort of       Yes

25. Do you wish you could fight like Turbine?
   No       Sort of       Yes

26. Do you think Turbine is cool?
   No       Sort of       Yes

27. Do you wish you could be like Maria?
   No       Sort of       Yes
28. Do you wish you could fight like Maria?
   No       Sort of       Yes

29. Do you think Maria is cool?
   No       Sort of       Yes

30. Do you wish you could be like Lobo?
   No       Sort of       Yes

31. Do you wish you could fight like Lobo?
   No       Sort of       Yes

32. Do you think Lobo is cool?
   No       Sort of       Yes

33. Was it wrong for Lobo to wrestle the Hula people?
   No       Sort of       Yes

34. Was it wrong for Maria to hit the people because she got herself into trouble?
   No       Sort of       Yes

35. Was it wrong for Turbine to wrestle the Hula people just because he wants the Hula people to listen to him?
   No       Sort of       Yes
Next, I would like you to think about how YOU act around other kids by answering the questions below.

1. Is fighting a good way to get what you want?
   No       Sort of       Yes

2. Is it okay to hit someone if they hit you first?
   No       Sort of       Yes

3. Do you like to watch people fight?
   No       Sort of       Yes

4. Do you think it’s funny when people get into fights?
   No       Sort of       Yes

5. If someone was really bothering you, will you push or hit them to get back at them?
   No       Sort of       Yes

6. If someone did something mean to you, will you push or hit them to get back at them?
   No       Sort of       Yes

Now I’d like you to answer some questions about the shows you saw.

1. Was Mandy right to hit Billy?
   No       Sort of       Yes

   Why? ______________________________________________
2. Was Wayne right to hit Lucien?
   No       Sort of       Yes
   Why? ______________________________________________

3. Was the Power Rangers right to fight the Grey people?
   No       Sort of       Yes
   Why? ______________________________________________

4. Was the Power Rangers right to fight those people in costumes?
   No       Sort of       Yes
   Why? ______________________________________________

Finally, tell us a few more things about you

1. Do you watch cartoons (such as “Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles”, “Power Puffs”, “Batman”)?
   No       Sometimes       Yes

2. Do you watch action adventure TV shows (such as “Power Rangers”)?
   No       Sometimes       Yes

3. Do you watch classic cartoons (such as “Bugs Bunny”, “Looney Tunes”)?
   No       Sometimes       Yes

4. Are you a boy or a girl?    Boy       Girl

5. What grade are you in?  _______
6. How old are you? _______

7. Which one is most like you? Circle your answer.

- Black (African American)  
- White (Caucasian)  
- Hispanic  
- Asian  
- Other

THAT’S IT!

THANKS FOR FILLING THIS OUT!!
APPENDIX C

MORAL MEDIATION MESSAGES
Condition 1: Judgment-only

1. Turbine was wrong to throw fireballs at the Hula people like that. Throwing things at people like that is wrong. You don’t solve a problem that way and it’s wrong to throw things at people.

2. Maria was wrong to fight the Hula people like that. Fighting like that is wrong. You don’t solve a problem that way and it’s wrong to hit people.

3. Lobo and Turbine were wrong to fight the Hula people like that. Fighting and wrestling like that is wrong. You don’t solve a problem that way and it’s wrong to fight and wrestle people.

Condition 2: Consequence-based Reasoning

1. Turbine was wrong to throw fireballs at the Hula people like that. Throwing things at people like that is wrong. In fact, Turbine even fell on the ground and got himself hurt. It’s wrong to solve a problem like that because Turbine even got himself hurt!

2. Maria was wrong to fight the Hula people like that. Fighting like that is wrong. She didn’t solve the problem and she even got herself into trouble. It’s wrong to solve a problem like that because Maria even got herself into trouble!

3. Lobo and Turbine were wrong to fight the Hula people like that. Fighting and wrestling like that is wrong. It can get you into trouble and you can even hurt yourself. It’s wrong to fight and there are other ways of solving the problem besides fighting and hitting.

Condition 3: Motive-based Reasoning

1. Turbine wanted the Hula people to listen to him but that doesn’t mean he can throw fireballs at them. Throwing things at people like that is wrong. He didn’t solve the problem at all. Just because you want other people to listen to you, doesn’t mean you can hurt them.

2. Maria was mad at the Hula people, but that doesn’t mean she can fight them like that. Fighting like that is wrong. She didn’t solve the problem at all. Just because you are mad, doesn’t mean you can hit people like that.

3. Lobo and Turbine wanted the Hula people to listen to them, but that doesn’t mean they can hit and kick the Hula people over and over again. Fighting and wrestling people like that to get what you want is wrong.
Condition 4: Control

1. The show is not over yet. I’ve taken the commercials out here. This black screen will last for about 15 seconds. So let’s sit here quietly and wait for the next scene.

2. The show is not over yet. I’ve taken the commercials out here. This black screen will last for about 15 seconds. So let’s sit here quietly and wait for the next scene.

3. The show is not over yet. I’ve taken the commercials out here. This black screen will last for about 15 seconds. So let’s sit here quietly and wait for the next scene.
APPENDIX D

MORAL REASONING CODING SCHEME FOR CHILDREN'S RESPONSES TO TELEVISIONED INTERPERSONAL VIOLENCE
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasoning Types</th>
<th>#</th>
<th>Decision Rules / Definitions</th>
<th>Exemplars (Los Luchadores)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Don’t know/ Blank</em></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>I don’t know.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Punishment/ Authority | 1 | Children of this type exhibit reasoning with emphasis on avoiding punishment and rules hand down by authorities. To them, behaviors that end in punishment are considered bad and those that end in rewards are considered good. Their reasoning tends to be a description of a fixed rule that people have to unquestioningly obey. | 1. She can go to jail for that.  
2. He’ll get in trouble.  
3. You could get caught. |
| Stereotyped Reasoning | 2 | This type of reasoning is similar to Punishment/Authority reasoning in the sense that children still exhibit tendency to obey rules unquestioningly. For instance, mentioning of rigid rules using of the word “should” without giving any reasons. However, media and violence research argued that stereotyped reasoning of violent act to demonstrate small progress in children’s moral reasoning in that children are showing signs of internalization of rules without articulating adults or authorities as the rule enforcers (Krcmar & Valkenberg, 1999). Consequently, their reasoning of right and wrong reflects stereotyped images of good and bad behaviors (people). | 1. Because it’s mean.  
2. It wasn’t nice.  
3. You shouldn’t use violence.  
4. Hula people are bad.  
5. Lobo was good. |
| Hedonistic Reasoning (Reciprocity) | 3 | Reasoning with emphasis on fairness according to reciprocity of equal exchanges. Therefore, children reason by emphasizing restitution for harm or action of revenge. Things are judged right when following rules that yield in one’s own interest or benefit. For example, “it’s right to hit because if someone hit you, you hit them back” or “she’s wrong to fight because they may fight her back”. This type of reasoning could be about self or the characters that they identify with. In essence, reciprocity reasoning reflects Piaget’s “tit-for-tat” morality of reasoning. “If somebody punches you in the arm three times, you should punch them back three times—no more, no less” (Piaget, 1965, p.139). The reasoning mechanism is similar to reasoning for mathematical equations that both sides have to even. | 1. So she can knock them out.  
2. They may fight her back.  
3. If she hit the people, they won’t stop.  
4. They did nothing to him. |
| Needs-oriented Reasoning | 4 | This type of reasoning is the beginning of children’s attempt to perspective-take. However, it stays at the level of focusing on individuals’ physical needs. Reasoning of right and wrong depends on more visible and tangible physical harmful outcomes of the violent act on either the perpetrator or the victim instead of psychological emotions and thoughts. For instance, their explanations circles around concerns for physical safety or pain. | 1. It could hurt him.  
2. He could die.  
3. He can kill somebody.  
4. You could fall down and break your head.  
5. Because it had fire on them. |
| Motive-based Reasoning | Children of this type reason through considerations of other people or characters’ emotions and thoughts. Reasoning begins to focus on intentions of the violent behavior or feelings being hurt as consequences of the violent behavior. | 1. Fighting is not how to get someone’s attention.  
2. He was just helping.  
3. To stop evil/save people. |
<table>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| Alternative Solution   | This type is a higher level of moral reasoning that demonstrates not only considerations of intention to fight but also the awareness of fighting as means of solution to problems. Children’s ability to think multi-dimensionally can be found through their provision of alternative solution to the depicted violent situation. They think outside of the situation. | 1. He should talk to them.  
2. He was over reacting.  
3. There are other ways to solve problems. |
| 6                      |                                                                                                 |                                                                                  |
| Human Rights           | This type also belongs to a higher level of moral reasoning because children show the ability to consider human rights. This is an early sign of ability to take perspectives from the societal standpoint. |                                                                                  |
| 7                      |                                                                                                 |                                                                                  |
REFERENCES


Nathanson, A. I., & Cantor, J. (2000). Reducing the aggression-promoting effect of


Second handbook of research on teaching (pp.732-758). Chicago: Rand McNally & Company.


