

# research snapshot

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## The Impact of Media on the Development of Preschoolers

### What is this research about?

Theory-of-Mind is the ability to think about the mental states of others. Children develop this capacity to understand that others have minds around the age of 4 years-old. The researchers were interested in whether exposure to different media was related to a child's development of theory-of-mind. The media studied included storybooks, TV programs, and movies.

### What did the researchers do?

In order to assess a child's exposure to different media, the researchers tested parents' knowledge of children's narrative media and then examined how it related to that child's theory-of-mind ability. 55 children aged 4-6 years old were tested, as well as one of their parents. The researchers looked for a relationship between the parent's knowledge of children's narrative media and the child's theory-of-mind ability.

To measure exposure to media, the parents were asked to identify the real names of children's authors, children's book titles, children's movies, and children's TV programs, picking them out from a list that also included made up names. The children were then tested and asked to think

### What you need to know:

Children whose parents know more about children's books and movies tended to have a better ability to understand what others are thinking and feeling. These children performed better on a series of tests than those with parents who knew very little about children's narrative media. These results are correlational, however, so causal inferences are not possible.

about the desires and beliefs of other people. Other things were measured so they could be controlled for statistically. This included parental knowledge of books, socioeconomic status, and the child's vocabulary.

### What did the researchers find?

The researchers found that children whose parents were more familiar with children's story books and movies did better on the theory-of-mind tests. This held true even after accounting for other factors like the child's age, sex, and the income of parents. However, they did not find that the parent's knowledge of children's TV related to the child's theory-of-mind capacity.

The researchers noted limitations to their study that should be looked at in future research. These included reviewing the type of media that children seek out on their own and their exposure to media in daycare or preschool.

This research is correlational so no causal inferences are possible. That is, this research does not prove that exposing your child to certain types of media will cause them to develop better theory-of-mind.

### How can you use this research?

Parents may use this research to consider how children's media can influence their child's growth. Other related research has highlighted the importance of discussing media content with children, so using storybooks and children's movies as a starting point for discussions around other people's thoughts and feelings might be a good idea. Educators may also consider working with parents to foster these types of discussion around children's media in the classroom. This may also inform future research, especially in the area of theory-of-mind theory and children's TV.

### About the Researchers

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### Keywords

Theory-of-mind, reading, television, movies, media exposure, preschoolers.

### Knowledge Mobilization at York

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