In a survey among 360 parent-child dyads (children aged 8–12 years), parent and child reports of parental advertising mediation activities were examined. The first aim was to investigate how parent-child agreement in reporting mediation differed by family and child factors. Results showed that agreement was highest in communication-oriented families and between parents and girls. The second aim was to examine the role of agreement in predicting the mediation outcome (i.e., reduced materialism). Both measures predicted the mediation outcome, but its effectiveness was contingent on parent-child agreement. Mediation was most effective when parents and children both reported that parents often discussed advertising.

The past 2 decades have witnessed an impressive rise in research investigating parental mediation of media content (for a review, see Austin, 2001). These studies have shown that parents and caregivers can reduce undesirable media effects, including television-induced aggression, fear, and risky sexual behavior (Buijzen, Walma van der Molen, & Sondij, 2007; Cantor, Sparks, & Hoffner, 1988; Nathanson, 1999, 2004; Nathanson & Cantor, 2000; Wilson & Donenberg, 2004), and advertising-induced responses, such as materialistic attitudes and parent-child conflict (Buijzen, 2007; Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2005; Fujioka & Austin, 2002). Although this research has produced a sophisticated body of knowledge, controversy exists regarding which is the more reliable source reporting media-related...
interactions: the parent or the child. Although both measures are common in the research literature, comparative studies have reported substantial disagreement between parent- and child-reported measures (Fujioka & Austin, 2002; Nathanson, 2001a; Rossiter & Robertson, 1975).

The observed disagreement between parent and child reports in mediation research concurs with research findings on more general types of family interactions (Ritchie & Fitzpatrick, 1990; Tims & Masland, 1985). Family communication theories generally attribute discrepant reports from family members to perceptual differences rather than to measurement error (Austin, 1992; Ritchie, 1991; Ritchie & Fitzpatrick, 1990). Research findings strongly suggest that the relatively weak correlations observed between parent and child reports of family interactions are due to systematic reporting differences. For instance, parents tend to report higher levels of interaction than do children (Rossiter & Robertson, 1975). Accordingly, Ritchie and Fitzpatrick (1990) have argued that parent-child agreement or disagreement in reporting family communication can be taken as an indicator of actual perceptual differences among family members.

In line with this argument, family communication research has shown that the level of parent-child agreement in reporting family interactions may depend on a number of factors, including general family communication style, the child’s age, and the child’s sex (Ritchie & Fitzpatrick, 1990). Parent and child factors that increase understanding between the parent and the child can explain these differential findings. For instance, older children are more capable of understanding family interactions, while communication-oriented parents put more effort into explaining their actions and intentions (Ritchie & Fitzpatrick, 1990). In other words, child perceptions of family communication relate to parent perceptions more closely among parent-child dyads with a higher level of mutual understanding.

As yet, this meaningful interpretation of parent-child agreement has not been investigated in research on media-related family interactions. The aim of the present study is to further explore agreement between parent and child reports of parental mediation. In a parent-child survey, parental mediation of children’s responses to advertising is examined. Parents have been shown to be able to reduce the undesired effects of advertising by actively explaining the purpose and nature of advertising (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2005; Fujioka & Austin, 2003; Wiman, 1983). However, most studies examining parental advertising mediation have relied exclusively on parent reports, while child reports of parental mediation are also included here.

The only study that compared parent and child reports of advertising mediation found a moderate correlation ($r = .20$) between the two measures (Fujioka & Austin, 2003). In addition, mediation reported by children in this study predicted children’s responses to advertising more strongly than did parent-reported mediation. On the basis of this finding, the authors argued that child reports of parental mediation signify children’s perceptions of their parents’ mediation activities and thus might be an important predictor of the mediation outcome. Unfortunately, the authors did not further examine this interpretation of parent-child agreement.
The current study expands on previous research in two ways. First, by investigating how parent-child agreement in reporting parental advertising mediation activities varies by several family and child factors (i.e., family communication style, child age, child sex). As yet, the extent to which parent-child agreement in reporting media-related family interactions depends on these factors has not been investigated. Second, this study expands on previous research by examining the role of parent-child agreement in predicting the mediation outcome. If child reports of parental mediation activities reflect their perception of these activities, it is conceivable that higher parent-child agreement will lead to more effective mediation. The role of parent-child agreement in predicting the effectiveness of parental mediation has not yet been addressed in empirical research.

Hypotheses on Parent-Child Agreement in Reporting Parental Advertising Mediation

To formulate specific hypotheses on the role of family and child factors in parent-child agreement in reporting mediation, this study draws upon insights from research on media-specific and more general family interactions (e.g., Fujioka & Austin, 2002; Ritchie & Fitzpatrick, 1990) as well as child development (Grusec & Goodnow, 1994).

**Family Communication.** First, general family communication patterns may affect parent-child agreement on parental mediation. It has been found that in families characterized by an overt communication style (i.e., favoring the open exchange of information among family members) parents are more likely to engage in media-related discussions with their children (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2005; Fujioka & Austin, 2002; Grusec & Goodnow, 1994; Warren, Gerke, & Kelly, 2002). In addition, it has been suggested that an open communication environment may be essential in obtaining a child’s awareness and acceptance of a parent’s intended interpretation of media messages (Fujioka & Austin, 2002). Highly communication-oriented parents put more effort into explaining their actions and intentions, which is likely to result in a higher level of parent-child agreement in reporting these actions (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002). In the present study, therefore, the expectation is to find higher agreement between parent and child reports of parental advertising mediation in families with relatively high communication orientation. It is hypothesized that:

\[ H_1: \] Agreement between parent and child reports of parental advertising mediation is greater in families high in communication orientation than in families low in communication orientation.

**Child’s Age.** Family communication researchers have also observed age-related differences in parent-child agreement on family interaction (Meadowcroft, 1986;
Due to increasing cognitive and social abilities, older children should be better able to recognize and comprehend parental messages than younger children (Grusec & Goodnow, 1994). Accordingly, earlier mediation research has suggested that young children may lack the socio-cognitive and information-processing skills to perceive and process parental mediation activities, whereas older children are progressively able to do so (Lang, 2000; Nathanson, 2004). Thus, if children’s ability to understand and report family interactions increases with age, then the correspondence between parent and child reports should be higher for older than for younger children. The following hypothesis is investigated:

\[ H_2: \text{Agreement between parent and child reports of parental advertising mediation is higher among older than among younger children.} \]

Child’s Sex. Parents’ behavior toward daughters sometimes differs from behavior toward sons (Desmond, Hirsch, Singer, & Singer, 1987; Van den Bulck & Van den Bergh, 2000). Parents generally put greater emphasis on the autonomy of boys, whereas they focus more on protectiveness, restriction, and supervision of girls (Cowan & Avants, 1988; Desmond et al., 1987). Moreover, even when boys and girls receive similar patterns of guidance, they perceive and react differently to it (Desmond et al., 1987; Grusec & Goodnow, 1994; Van den Bulck & Van den Bergh, 2000). In particular, girls have been shown to react more to informational cues administered by their parents, whereas boys are influenced more by power assertions (Ely, Gleason, & McCabe, 1996; Gunter & McAleer, 1997). In the present study, parental mediation of advertising is defined as active discussion of the purpose and nature of advertising (cf. Austin, 1993; Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2005). Given that such verbal explanations refer to informational cues, it is expected that girls will be more aware of parental mediation activities than boys. The prediction is that:

\[ H_3: \text{Agreement between parent and child reports of parental advertising mediation is higher among girls than among boys.} \]

The Role of Parent-Child Agreement in Predicting the Mediation Outcome

The second aim is to examine the role of parent-child agreement in predicting the mediation outcome. More specifically, it is investigated whether the effectiveness of parental mediation in reducing the effects of advertising is contingent upon the level of parent-child agreement in reporting advertising mediation. The focus is on advertising-induced materialistic attitudes as the mediation outcome, because this concept is generally considered one of the most important undesired consequences of children’s exposure to television advertising (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2005; Greenberg & Brand, 1993; Moschis & Moore, 1982).
Several authors have suggested that advertising enhances materialism because it is designed to arouse desires for products that would not otherwise be salient (Greenberg & Brand, 1993; Pollay, 1986). Advertising propagates the ideology that possessions are important and that desirable qualities—such as beauty, success, and happiness—can be obtained only by acquiring material possessions (Pollay, 1986). However, previous research has demonstrated that parental advertising mediation can moderate the relation between children’s advertising exposure and their materialistic attitudes (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2003).

Unfortunately, little is known about the factors determining the effectiveness of advertising mediation. It is important to investigate whether the level of parent-child agreement in reporting mediation has consequences for its success. In developmental psychology, it is assumed that the effectiveness of parental discipline is based on the child’s accurate perception and acceptance of the parental message (Grusec & Goodnow, 1994). In line with this assumption, Fujioka and Austin (2003) have argued that the more aware children are of parental mediation messages, the more they apply those messages while processing media content.

Thus, it is expected that the effectiveness of parental advertising mediation depends on the level of agreement between the parent and the child regarding the parent-administered mediation. More specifically, parental mediation will only be effective in reducing the relation between advertising and materialistic attitudes when parent-child agreement in reporting mediation is high; that is, when children accurately perceive their parents’ mediation activities. The following hypothesis is investigated:

\[ H_4: \text{The effectiveness of advertising mediation in reducing the relation between advertising exposure and materialistic attitudes is greater when parent-child agreement about mediation is high.} \]

**Method**

**Sample and Procedure**

Data were drawn from a larger parent-child survey investigating children’s responses to advertising (see Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2003, 2005). The children in the sample were recruited from five elementary schools in the Netherlands. In all, 427 children completed a paper-and-pencil questionnaire. After completing the questionnaire, the children were given a parent questionnaire to take home. A total of 360 parent questionnaires (84%) were returned, yielding a total sample of 360 parent-child dyads from various economic backgrounds. The final child sample consisted of 175 boys (48.6%) and 185 girls (51.4%) between the ages of 8 and 12 (\(M = 10.0, SD = 1.25\)). The parent sample consisted of 291 mothers and 61 fathers and 8 parents who did not indicate their gender.\(^2\)
A letter asking the primary caregiver to fill out the parent questionnaire was also attached. If more than one child in a family brought home the questionnaire, the parent was asked to complete one for each child with that child in mind. After all the questionnaires were collected, the parents were informed about the nature and purpose of the study via the school newspaper. All the children, including those who had not returned the questionnaire, were given a present.

**Measures**

**Parental Advertising Mediation.** To determine parental advertising mediation, a television mediation scale developed by Valkenburg, Krcmar, Peeters, and Marseille (1999) was used. The items representing an active mediation style (e.g., how often parents try to help their children understand what they see on television) were adapted to (1) reflect mediation activities more directly relevant to television advertising and (2) render items appropriate for children and adults, respectively. The 5 items dealt with the frequency, 1 (never), 2 (sometimes), 3 (often), of the various mediation strategies used by parents. Scales were constructed by averaging parent scores ($M = 1.93, SD = .46$) and child scores ($M = 1.52, SD = .53$). Simple $t$ tests showed, in agreement with earlier studies, that the mean scores of parent mediation reports were significantly higher than those reported by children $t(359) = 12.78$, $p < .001$

Scale reliabilities were satisfactory for parents (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .80$) as well as for children ($\alpha = .76$). To control for the possibility that age-related differences might be due to younger children's difficulty in reliably responding to the mediation items, the alpha reliabilities by age group (<10 and $\geq$10 years) were also calculated. These additional reliability analyses yielded no substantial difference between younger ($\alpha = .74$) and older children ($\alpha = .77$).

In addition, a measure was created for parent-child agreement in reporting parental advertising mediation. To do so, disagreement between child- and parent-reported mediation was first computed by subtracting child scores from parent scores and computing the absolute values of these scores. This disagreement measure was then reversed by subtracting all scores from the maximum value, resulting in a measure for parent-child agreement (range 0–2.00, $M = 1.41, SD = 0.44$).

**Advertising Exposure.** To measure children's advertising exposure, children were presented with the titles of 10 commercials broadcast on several television channels in the data collection period (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2000, 2003). The children were asked to indicate whether they had seen each one, 1 (never), 2 (sometimes), or 3 (often). A total score of children's advertising exposure was calculated by averaging the scores on the commercials ($\alpha = .77, M = 2.13, SD = 0.41$).

**Materialistic Attitudes.** To ascertain the children's level of materialism, the researchers adopted a scale used by most studies on the relation between advertising
and materialism (e.g., Churchill & Moschis, 1979; Moschis & Moore, 1982). Examples of questions were: (1) Do you think it is important to have a lot of money? and (2) Do you think it is important to own a lot of things? Children responded to the questions on a 4-point scale, ranging from 1 (no, not at all) to 4 (yes, very much). A materialism scale was constructed by averaging the scores on the five items ($\alpha = .70, M = 2.74, SD = 0.55$).

Family Communication. To measure family communication, a scale was developed based on the concept-oriented items (i.e., emphasizing negotiation, individual ideas, and opinions) of the Family Communications Patterns scale (Chaffee, McLeod, & Atkin, 1971). The list of seven items measured family communication on a 4-point scale, ranging from 1 (never) to 4 (often). A total family communication score was constructed by averaging the scores on the seven items ($\alpha = .79, M = 2.53, SD = 0.52$). By way of median split, the researchers distinguished parent-child dyads low on communication orientation ($n = 193, M = 2.14, SD = 0.26$) from parent-child dyads high on communication orientation ($n = 167, M = 2.69, SD = 0.36$).

Results

Agreement Between Parent and Child Reports in Different Subgroups ($H_1$–$H_3$)

To investigate the first set of hypotheses, zero-order correlations were examined between parent- and child-reported mediation measures for the total sample, low versus high communication-oriented families, younger versus older children, and boys versus girls (see Table 1).

The correlation analysis in the total sample yielded a moderate positive correlation between parent- and child reports, which was comparable to correlations found in earlier research (Fujioka & Austin, 2003). However, the strength of the correlation between parent- and child-reported measures varied considerably across different subgroups. Statistical significance of the differences between the correlation coefficients in the various subgroups were computed with the formula $z = z_{r1} - z_{r2}/\sqrt{(1/N_1 - 3) + (1/N_2 - 3)}$ (see McCall, 1998). These tests showed that the correlations between parent and child reports were significantly higher (1) in families high in communication orientation than families low in communication orientation ($p < .01$) and (2) for girls than boys ($p < .01$). Although the correlation was also higher for older children than younger children, this difference was not significant ($p = .17$).

The Role of Parent-Child Agreement in the Effectiveness of Parental Advertising Mediation ($H_4$)

To investigate the fourth hypothesis a three-way interaction design was used, because moderator effects were expected for parental advertising mediation (i.e.,...
in reducing the relation between advertising exposure and materialism) as well as parent-child agreement (i.e., in enhancing the moderating effect of advertising mediation). More specifically, a three-way interaction analysis was conducted in multiple regression to investigate the relation between advertising exposure and materialism as conditional on advertising mediation and parent-child agreement in reporting mediation (Aiken & West, 1991; Eveland, 1997).

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(Sub)samples</th>
<th>Pearson’s $r$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total sample ($N = 360$)</td>
<td>.25***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family communication</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low ($n = 193$)</td>
<td>.15*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High ($n = 167$)</td>
<td>.31***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child’s age</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$&lt;10$ ($n = 132$)</td>
<td>.18*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\geq 10$ ($n = 228$)</td>
<td>.28***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child’s sex</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys ($n = 175$)</td>
<td>.10*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls ($n = 185$)</td>
<td>.39***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. $ab$ Column values with different superscripts differ significantly at $p < .01$.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .001$.

Two hierarchical regression analyses were conducted with children’s materialistic attitudes as the dependent variable, one for parent- and one for child-reported advertising mediation. In both analyses, five predictors were entered: advertising exposure, advertising mediation (either parent- or child-reported), parent-child agreement, an advertising exposure*advertising mediation interaction term, and an advertising exposure*advertising mediation*parent-child agreement interaction term. Family communication, child age, and child sex were entered as control variables.

As expected, both analyses yielded a positive relation between children’s advertising exposure and their materialistic attitudes. If parent- or child-reported advertising mediation indeed moderated this relation, a significant two-way interaction between advertising mediation and advertising exposure should occur. In addition,
Table 2
Relations Between Advertising Exposure and Materialistic Attitudes as Conditional on Parent- and Child-Reported Advertising Mediation and Parent-Child Agreement in Reporting Mediation—Regression Analyses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor Variables</th>
<th>Materialistic Attitudes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$\beta$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parent reports</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertising exposure</td>
<td>.19***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent-reported advertising mediation</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent-child agreement</td>
<td>-.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent-reported mediation*advertising exposure</td>
<td>-.13*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent-reported mediation<em>advertising exposure</em>parent-child agreement</td>
<td>-.10*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2 = .12$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Child reports</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertising exposure</td>
<td>.25***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child-reported advertising mediation</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent-child agreement</td>
<td>-.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child-reported mediation*advertising exposure</td>
<td>-.11*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child-reported mediation<em>advertising exposure</em>parent-child agreement</td>
<td>-.11*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2 = .13$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Regression analyses controlled for family communication, child age, and child sex.

$^*p < .05$. $^{***}p < .001$.

if parent-child agreement in reporting advertising mediation moderated the effect of the mediation, a significant three-way interaction between advertising exposure, advertising mediation, and parent-child agreement should occur (Aiken & West, 1991).

Table 2 shows that for parent as well as child reports, both the two-way (i.e., advertising exposure*advertising mediation) and the three-way (i.e., advertising exposure*advertising mediation*parent-child agreement) interaction predictors were significant. In order to more thoroughly understand what the interactions meant, the significant interactions were plotted and probed (cf. Dawson & Richter, 2006; Preacher, Curran, & Bauer, 2006).

Figure 1 illustrates the two- and three-way interactions for parent-reported mediation. The upper interaction plot illustrates the impact of children’s advertising exposure on materialistic attitudes as conditional on parent-reported advertising mediation. The broken regression line indicates the advertising-materialism relation.

Downloaded By: [Universiteit van Amsterdam] At: 09:22 3 March 2009
Figure 1
Interaction Plots for Parent Reports: Two- and Three-Way Interaction Relations
Between Advertising Exposure and Materialistic Attitudes as Conditional on Parent-Reported Advertising Mediation and Parent-Child Agreement in Reporting Mediation

Note. **p < .01. ***p < .001.
for children who often received mediation, and the solid line indicates the same relation for children who received less or no mediation. The slope of the line indicates the direction and strength of the relation. As can be seen in the figure, the relation for children who often received mediation was weaker ($\beta = .16, p < .01$) than for children who received less or no mediation ($\beta = .30, p < .001$).

The lower plot in Figure 1 illustrates the impact of children’s advertising exposure on materialistic attitudes as conditional on (1) parent-reported advertising mediation and (2) parent-child agreement in reporting mediation. Again, the broken regression lines indicate the advertising-materialism relation for children from parents who often applied mediation, and the solid lines indicate the same relations for children from parents who applied less or no mediation. Furthermore, triangles mark relations for parent-child dyads with high agreement, and squares indicate relations for low parent-child agreement. As can be seen in the figure, the advertising-materialism relation was weakest (and nonsignificant: $\beta = -.05, ns$) among parent-child dyads with high mediation and high agreement. Posthoc probing analysis (Dawson & Richter, 2006) showed that this relation was significantly weaker than the remaining three relations.

Figure 2 illustrates the two- and three-way interactions for child-reported mediation. The interaction plots for child reports yielded similar patterns to those for parent reports. As can be seen in the upper interaction plot (which illustrates the advertising-materialism relation as conditional on child-reported advertising mediation), the relation for children who often received mediation was weaker ($\beta = .13, p < .05$) than for children who received less or no mediation ($\beta = .30, p < .001$).

The lower plot in Figure 2 illustrates the impact of children’s advertising exposure on materialistic attitudes as conditional on child-reported advertising mediation and parent-child agreement. The advertising-materialism relation was weakest (and nonsignificant: $\beta = .03, ns$) among parent-child dyads who both reported that parents frequently engaged in mediation activities. Again, posthoc probing analysis showed that the remaining three relations were significantly stronger than the relation among parent-child dyads with high mediation and high agreement. Thus, in agreement with the fourth hypothesis, the impact of advertising on materialistic attitudes was most effectively reduced among parent-child dyads with high parent-child agreement in reporting mediation.

Discussion

In a parent-child survey, the authors examined parent and child reports of parental mediation of advertising. The first aim was to examine how parent-child agreement in reporting advertising mediation varied by family and child factors (i.e., family communication style, child age, and child sex). Overall, the analyses yielded a positive moderate relation between child- and parent-reported mediation, which
Figure 2  
Interaction Plots for Child Reports: Two- and Three-Way Interaction Relations  
Between Advertising Exposure and Materialistic Attitudes as  
Conditional on Child-Reported Advertising Mediation and  
Parent-Child Agreement in Reporting Mediation

Note. *p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

was comparable to the strength of the relations found in previous mediation research  
(Fujioka & Austin, 2003; Nathanson, 2001a).  
However, parent-child agreement differed considerably by family and child  
factors. As hypothesized, parent-child agreement was higher in families characterized
by an overt communication style ($H_1$), and between parents and girls ($H_2$). These differential findings concur with family communication theories assuming that child perceptions of parental mediation relate to parent reports more closely among parent-child dyads with a higher level of mutual understanding (Fujioka & Austin, 2002; Ritchie & Fitzpatrick, 1990). However, the hypothesis concerning the role of children’s age ($H_2$) was not confirmed. Although parent-child agreement was stronger among older children, this pattern was not significant. It is conceivable that the relatively small age range of the study limited comparisons between age groups.

The second aim of the study was to investigate whether the effectiveness of parental advertising mediation in reducing advertising-induced materialism would be influenced by the level of agreement between parents and children in reporting mediation ($H_4$). Overall, parent and child measures showed equal strength in predicting the outcome of the mediation. For parent as well as child reports, the relation between advertising and materialistic attitudes was significantly reduced when parental advertising mediation was high. However, the effectiveness of advertising mediation was contingent on the level of agreement between parents and children in reporting mediation. More specifically, the relation between advertising exposure and materialistic attitudes was most effectively reduced among parent-child dyads who both reported that parents frequently discussed the role and nature of advertising.

These findings can be explained by theories of family communication and child development, which assume that (1) child reports indicate children’s perception of parental mediation activities (Ritchie & Fitzpatrick, 1990), and (2) the effectiveness of parental mediation efforts is based on children’s accurate perception of the mediation message (Fujioka & Austin, 2003; Grusec & Goodnow, 1994). The strength of both child- and parent-reported mediation measures in predicting the mediation outcome depended on parent-child agreement, suggesting that parental mediation is more effective when children accurately perceive their parents’ mediation activities. In other words, a high parent-child agreement indicated children’s accurate perception of parental mediation activities, resulting in more successfully reducing the effects of advertising.

The present study focused on differences in perception between parents and children as an explanation for parent-child disagreement in reporting mediation. It has to be noted, however, that an alternative explanation has been raised in the literature, which attributes parent-child disagreement to a social desirability bias in parents’ responses (Fujioka & Austin, 2003; Rossiter & Robertson, 1975). According to this view, parents tend to overreport on their mediation activities, because they consider mediation behavior socially desirable (Desmond, Singer, Calani, & Colimore, 1985; Fujioka & Austin, 2003). However, the patterns observed in this study point toward perceptual differences rather than social desirability as an explanation for parent-child disagreement in reporting mediation.

According to the social desirability view, a low parent-child agreement would indicate a high parental tendency to give socially desirable responses. This alterna-
tive explanation is not likely to account for the variations in parent-child agreement observed in different subgroups (see Table 1). In the case of family communication, the social desirability explanation would even predict an opposite pattern than the one observed. Parents who tend to overreport on the mediation scale for reasons of social desirability are likely to do the same on the family communication scale, which is a related construct (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2005). Following this line of reasoning, for parents reporting high levels of family communication one would expect to see relatively low parent-child agreement in reporting mediation, because those parents would overreport their mediation activities. In contrast, a higher parent-child agreement was observed on the mediation scale among highly communication-oriented parents.

In conclusion, the observed variations in parent-child agreement by family and child factors are more likely to be caused by perceptual differences than social desirability. The authors therefore believe it is safe to assume that this explanation also accounts for the findings on the role of parent-child agreement in predicting the mediation outcome.

Limitations and Implications for Further Research

This study yielded important insights about the nature and role of parent-child agreement in reporting parental mediation activities, but a number of limitations need to be addressed. First, even though the authors have argued that parent-child disagreement in reporting mediation can be attributed to perceptual differences rather than to social desirability bias, there was no explicit control for the latter explanation. To come to definite conclusions, future research should include control measures of social desirability bias (e.g., Baxter et al., 2004).

Second, Grusec and Goodnow (1994) have argued that the effectiveness of parental discipline is determined not only by the child's accurate perception, but also acceptance of the message. After all, a child may accurately perceive a parental message, but choose not to apply it. The present study focused only on perception, because the main aim was to explore the meaning of agreement between parent and child reports. In order to fully understand the mechanisms by which parental mediation messages can lead to changes in children's media responses, future research should also include children's acceptance or rejection of the parental message.

Third, the authors focused on parental mediation of television advertising effects. However, the mediation literature covers a wide range of children's media responses, including undesirable (e.g., aggression, alcohol use, risky sexual behavior) as well as desirable responses (e.g., learning from educational programs). Further research is needed to investigate whether the patterns observed for advertising effects will also hold for mediation of other types of media responses. In addition, future research could investigate how these patterns hold for different styles of mediation, for instance comparing negative versus positive (Austin, 1993) and factual versus evaluative mediation (Buijzen & Mens, 2007; Nathanson, 2004). Finally, future
research could incorporate the role of other socialization agents, such as siblings and peers (Desmond et al., 1985; Nathanson, 2001b).

Taking into account these limitations, these findings have yielded important theoretical and methodological insights, which can give direction to further research on parental mediation of children’s media responses. The study contributes to theoretical understanding by demonstrating that parent-child agreement in reporting parental mediation activities can be a key variable in predicting the mediation outcome. These results indicate that the better children perceive parental mediation messages, the more those messages succeed in modifying media effects. Future research could investigate how children’s awareness and acceptance of their parents’ mediation efforts can be enhanced in order to increase the effectiveness of these efforts.

Finally, these findings also have methodological implications regarding the use of parent versus child measures, and contribute to the ongoing academic debate regarding the more accurate source reporting media-related interactions. On the one hand, it has been argued that child reports are adequate, because they indicate children’s perceptions of the mediation and are therefore better predictors of the mediation outcome. On the other hand, some researchers prefer to use parent reports, because they are the ones administering the mediation and may therefore give a more accurate account of their actual behavior. Based on the substantial and meaningful differences between parent and child reports, several researchers have argued to account for all family members’ perceptions (Austin, 1992; Ritchie & Fitzpatrick, 1990). However, investigating both parents and children can be time-consuming and expensive, and the question remains how to treat such complex family data.

This study has provided more insight into which perspective could be taken into account in a given research context. Overall, if researchers are trying to collect valid data but minimize research expense, either parent or child reports can be used. After all, both measures predicted the mediation outcome regardless of parent-child agreement in reporting parental mediation activities. However, for a complete understanding of parental advertising mediation, parent-child agreement in reporting mediation has to be taken into account.

Notes

1The literature on parental mediation has so far identified three strategies that parents use to modify media effects: active mediation (i.e., talking to children about television), restrictive mediation (i.e., setting rules restricting children’s television viewing), and social coviewing (i.e., simply watching television with children) (e.g., Valkenburg et al., 1999). In the present study, the focus is on active mediation because this has repeatedly been shown to be most effective in reducing advertising effects (Austin, 1993; Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2005).

2Mothers and fathers did not differ significantly in reporting advertising mediation, t(349) = .82, p = .41.

3The complete scales can be found at the authors’ Web site: http://www.cam-ascor.nl/
References


