

Writing with semantic argument or statistics



Topic: TV cartoons cause violent behavior in children Parental Guidance: Why

TV Cartoons Have More Need of Them “ What’s up Doc?” is an expression that is just as iconic as the character that made it one of TV’s most famous and timeless lines. Parents and children alike, and all over the world, are not strangers to Bugs Bunny, Tom and Jerry, Popeye, The Flintstones, and their ilk. Over the years, this breed of cartoon characters have grown and spread and children of this generation are also being reared on Power Rangers, Batman, Dora the Explorer, Barney, etc. TV cartoons have ranged from the educational to the entertaining, often substituting for parents who are too busy to share more quality time with their toddlers. Never mind the content, TV cartoons are the cheaper alternative to hiring a baby-sitter and is the safest way to keep even a hyperactive toddler distracted. Or so parents generally believed. But this rather cavalier attitude parents have towards their very young children watching TV cartoons – of any and all sorts – have pediatric experts worried; studies have shown that TV cartoons may be to blame about the increasingly antisocial tendencies of children even at a young age, attitudes that they may carry with them into adulthood. Could TV cartoons really be as bad an influence?

One way to determine the influence of TV cartoons is to look at the statistics. TV sets may be the most common feature among American households; about 99% percent of homes are not without their own TV sets as television programming are the cheapest and most convenient way to be entertained and informed. The average child watches up to two hours of TV cartoons each day (Center for Communication and Social Policy, University of California, Santa Barbara [UCSB], 1998) and some even as much as 28 hours of cartoons each week (Beresin, n. d.). But what is more alarming about this

fact is not the quantity of TV time but the quality of the program. Studies revealed that shows that target the very young audiences contain twice as many violent acts as other programs; furthermore, Saturday morning cartoons have been recorded to contain as much as 20 to 25 violent incidents per hour compared to 3 to 5 violent incidents found in prime-time TV (American Academy of Pediatrics [AAP], 1995).

Not all TV cartoons feature this rather stunning amount of violence. A recent study conducted to determine the effects of violence in media on children's anti-social behavior was conducted by Drs. Christakis and Zimmerman in 2007. They classified TV programs that target the young audiences into three categories: violent programming, non-violent programming, and educational programming. Educational programming includes the likes of Sesame Street and Winnie the Pooh while Toy Story and The Flintstones fall under the non-violent programming category. Power Rangers, Spiderman, and Looney Tunes are just some examples of what may be considered violent entertainment. Such violent entertainment features what UCLA Center for Communication Policy (2002) termed as "sinister combat violence" where violence is seemingly central to the story.

Christakis and Zimmerman's study (2007) indicated that children who watch these violent shows, especially boys, do exhibit aggressive behavior: but how? Violent TV cartoons are more than just stories to keep children entertained as they do adults. Violent TV cartoons are something which children try to emulate, often acting out aggressive acts with their peers at play. "Heroes" commit acts of violence in order to triumph over the "villains" thereby giving children the idea that such acts are necessary to mete out justice and may even be deserving of rewards (Beresin, n. d.).

Children under 7 years old are especially vulnerable because they do not realize the difference between real life and fantasy (Bushman & Huesmann, 2001).

The statistics on the amount of violent incidents on cartoons alone would mean children are exposed to as much as 10, 000 violent acts in just a year, far more violence than they would ordinarily see. This much violence even in seemingly innocent TV cartoon shows could not fail to influence very young children especially when stories take a rather twisted view on violence – that it is cool to carry guns, that violence solves problems, and that violent acts are ordinary occurrences. Children who turn violent, unruly, and undisciplined may be shaped so by several other factors other than violent TV cartoons. TV cartoons, however, are something within the confines of the home and within the sphere of influence of parents. In light of what statistics are telling us regarding TV cartoon violence, parents may need to step up to playing their role instead of allowing TV to rear their kids for them.

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