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Impact of Cartoon on Child Development

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Abstract

With the expansion and immensity of media, cartoons have become an easily accessible source of entertainment for children. It is an effortless mode of keeping the children engrossed in their own world. Parents are also calm and comfortable with this all time favorite activity of their children. Outdoor games and activities are replaced by indoor pastimes like watching TV or cartoon movies. This has led to a number of ill effects on the development pattern of these young toddlers. In the long run it might also lead to violence and hyper activity among such children. Parents could help their children firstly by putting a check on the content of these popular cartoon shows and secondly making them understand the difference between reality and fantasy.

Key Words: Cartoon, ill effects, development of children, parental guidance

Cartoons in the present time serve to be an easily accessible source of entertainment to all the children aged between 6 months to 3-4 years. It is the biggest source of entertainment for children as they develop strong connection fondness and affiliation towards them (Kemnitz, 1973). It is expedient to the parents also as their children are busy with it as their all time favorite activity. One data in a research study revealed that revenue generated by Cartoon Network in the year 2000 was \$500 million (Westcott, 2002). There are a wide range of cartoons beginning from "Fairy Tales" to "Scooby Doo" to "Bugs Bunny" to "Beauty and the beast" to "Ben Ten" to "Pokémon" to "Doremon" to "Shinchan" etc. The main lead character in these cartoon series sometimes adversely affects the psyche of young children. For example the well known cartoon character Nobita in the illustrious cartoon series Doremon is shown

as a mischievous and irresponsible brat who scores poor grades in school. Ahead in this line he is also shown to have a girlfriend named Shizuka whom he sets to marry in future. Such contents at such a tender age might deviate the young brains of these children in such a way that they get carried away from reality to fantasy.

Animations are being used to convey messages to target audience (Ginmann, 2003) and the audience may diverge on variables like age, interest gender ((Klein and Shiffman, 2006). Perceived gender differences can also be observed at this stage. Small girls are fond of watching fairy tales and animated Barbie series contrary to boys who are usually into cartoons like "Spiderman" or "Batman" and other action flicks cartoon. As compared to the previous times, outdoor entertainment activities and games have been replaced with more of

indoor entertainment activities like cartoons, video games, play station etc.

These wide ranges of cartoons vary in terms of their content and characters. The dissimilarity lies in the amount of violence that is being showcased in one set of cartoon series versus some other. Many of the cartoon series contain violence as a vital part. Studies have reported that violence shown in the content of these cartoons has provided evidence that unhealthy content will increase hostile behavior among youngsters both in long term and short term (Anderson, 2003). Researches have reported that cartoon content showcases more violence than any other serial plays or comedy shows (Potter and Warren, 1998). Cartoon characters stimulate interpersonal behavior, learning and social growth. Children at such an early stage are incapable to differentiate between fantasy and reality which quite often result in affecting their psyche either cheerfully or adversely. Small children frequently connect themselves with the cartoon characters more gladly than adults, thus a lot depends upon the content which they are watching. Where, cartoon characters that convey moral or ethical lessons help in strengthening and speed up learning process among children, there are certain others that reinforce violence and anti social behavior among them. Due to strong affiliation with few super natural heroes, children sometimes fall victim to serious injuries (Saturnine, 2004).

Children watching cartoons full of violence tend to be nervous, aggressive and belligerent. Ill effects of watching such cartoons can result in poor sleep and can also cause behavioral and emotional

problems, later school difficulties and even obesity/ overweight. In the longer run they also show up signs of impatience and disobedience.

According to a research carried out by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and the American Academy Of Child and Adolescent (AAP), “Children who view show in which violence is very realistic, frequently repeated or unpunished are more likely to imitate what they see.”

It has been found in some studies that children who are prone of watching cartoons for longer duration have a higher probability of developing mental and emotional problems affecting brains and eye injuries. Reports from Bowling Green State University cite a detrimental effect on brains of children who watch too many cartoons, have a tendency to develop attention deficit disorder.

In other psychological researches psychologists have emphasized the negative impact of cartoons on child psyche. According to their conclusions, children watching cartoon 3-4 hours a day are more prone to violence, marginalization of cognitive functions, and divergence from reality and increase in negative behavior over the due course of time.

The three major concerns for children watching violent cartoons are viz.

- ✓ They become insensitive towards other people’s needs and pains
- ✓ Violent settings don’t seem discomfoting to them
- ✓ They become more prone to aggressive reactions and violent behavior

The negative impact of cartoons can be prevented by making little effort on part of parents and elders. Primarily they should be taught to differentiate between fantasy and reality, along with the fact that cartoon series shown on television are part of fantasy world. Children are to be told that fantasies have no true value and identity. Parents can help identify their children with cartoon characters that serve as positive role models and encouraging good moral behavior e.g. superman as a role model can help in inculcating bravery and honesty and Popeye encouraging children to eat spinach which is healthy and makes them stronger. On the other side, children must also be encouraged for outdoor games and physical exercise so as to remain healthy.

As the children reach the age of 3, they gain the ability to imitate behaviors that are coming their way. Parents often are not aware of the severity of the situation because initially it becomes an easy way to escape their children's attention simultaneously keeping them entertained and busy thus helping mothers to do away with domestic responsibility.

Many of the standard animated series are no longer broadcasted on cartoon network on a regular basis with an exception of Tom and Jerry and Loony Tunes due to their popularity among children (Susan, 2000).

Experts conclude that kids who watch cartoons full of violence tend to be nervous, aggressive and belligerent. Moreover, these children are impatient and disobedient. An example to be quoted here is yet another very popular cartoon series Tom and Jerry. Tom is showed to be a little bit of a fool,

while Jerry is a clever roguish. In this entire cartoon episode both of them fight with different type of tools, which seems funny. However, at times the situation might fall dangerous for children in reality because they learn those activities from cartoons and want to use them in real life.

The impact has a hazardous effects on children's mind because they in many cartoons that their character jump, dive, and fall from heights with a safe landing without being harmed. They encourage aggressiveness and anti-social behavior, make children less sensitive to violence and to victims of violence, and increase their appetite for more violence in entertainment and in real life. Cartoon characters however always endure these actions perfectly like super hero's which acts like unrealistic message to children who in turn believe that when you hurt or kill someone he or she would remain unharmed. This thought pattern is encountered because they do not know the difference between fantasy and reality. Parents who are expected to act as boundaries against these faulty notions of their children seem to be glad and relaxed with this as long as the cartoon doesn't promote any adult material or any kind of violence. They should work towards telling their children that violent behavior is not the best course of action to resolve a conflict.

To make cartoons an easy source of healthy entertainment which helps the children with effective learning, parents should pay more attention in providing selected cartoons to them which could have a positive impact on them. Parents must also control the time children spend watching TV. The best solution can be to regularly sit watch and

discuss the characters of cartoons with children. This would help in not only keeping their kids away from violence but also making them differentiate between fantasy and reality.

A number of cartoons on the other hand are not only the best source of entertainment. Instead, could also be used for educational purposes. For instance, cartoons like 'Barney' can be used to stop some toddler from crying whereas 'Blues Clues' or 'Dora the Explorer' can be used for some brain activity making children learning shapes or identify colors etc. One of the teachers at a local primary school said, "For mind building and constructive learning of children, students have a cartoon period once a week, and we try to show them standard cartoons after thorough selection so that they could derive something positive out of it." A psychology student Amna Ejaz shared her views regarding this issue, "Give your children time to watch cartoons as it is the most common source for education, expose them with programs which are appropriate as per parental guidance."

The impact of cartoons can be made positive by a little effort on the part of parents. They have to make children realize that these fantasy things have no true value and identity, no such 'Spiderman' exists who will jump from top of one building to another with the help of his web, there is no such 'Ben 10' wristwatch which will start blinking and will alert Ben of every evil action before hand. If someone is killed or beaten up by cartoons it does not mean that children should also start attempting for the same. Parents need to keep an eye on their child's activity and should be alert of any peculiar changes in their behavior. During add breaks they should converse with children just to make clear the reality of things. Further parents should also respond to the controversial and ambiguous questions children have in their mind. Thus, for making cartoons a healthy source of entertainment and a good and effective foundation for learning, parents should pay a little attention towards providing selective cartoons to their children which could have a positive impact on them.

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