



Research Paper

Impact of Cartoon Violence: Issues of Aggressive and Hostile Behaviour in Children.

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ABSTRACT:

Research indicates that exposure to violence makes it more acceptable to kids. Aggression and hostility have been the linchpin of cartoons and animations forever. Present day children's animations are so realistic for the children that they find it difficult to differentiate between real action and pretend violence. To cite a few examples are violence depicted in *Tom and Jerry* cartoons, *Road Runner*, *Looney Tunes*, *Popeye the Sailor Man* and *Toy Story 3*. *Tom and Jerry* depict a long-running slapstick fight between a cat and a mouse, during which each uses increasingly outlandish and violent methods to defeat the other. When children are put under social pressure to resort to violence, they consider it normal and justifiable. *Toy Story 3* of the Pixar's trilogy also depicts characters put through violent and brutal treatments similar to concentration camps. Children tend to develop a belief system that thinks the world is more harmful and violent than it really is. Parents must not be tricked into thinking that if a story is presented in a cartoon format has a lesser impact on children.

KEYWORDS: Children, Violence, Cartoon, animations, aggression.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Over the recent years children have been more exposed to violence than earlier. Scientific study proves that being exposed to violence makes the kids more aggressive in nature. Aggression and power has been the success of cartoons and animations for decades. Present day children's animations are so realistic for the children that they find it difficult to differentiate between real action and pretend violence. To cite, a few examples are violence depicted in *Tom and Jerry* cartoons, *Toy Story 3*, *Rabbids Invasion*, *Cracked* and *Happy Tree Friend*.

Tom and Jerry depict a long-running comical fight between a cat and a mouse, during which each uses increasingly outlandish and violent methods to defeat the other. When children are put under social pressure, they resort to violence and consider it normal and justifiable. *Toy Story 3* of the Pixar's trilogy also depicts characters put through violent and brutal treatments similar to concentration camps. Children tend to believe that their surroundings are more dangerous than it really is. It is a general notion that parents think that it is okay for the kids to watch cartoon violence.

Exposure to violence in the media-through television, the cinema, and the internet-touches virtually every child. Though often quoted, the statistics from the American Psychiatric Association bear repeating: The typical American child watches 28 hours of television a week, and by the age of 18 will have seen 16,000 simulated murders and 200,000 acts of violence.¹⁴ Commercial television for children is 50 to 60 times more violent than prime-time pro-grams for adults, and some cartoons average more than 80 violent acts per hour. With the advent of videocassette sales and rentals of movies, pay-per-view TV, cable TV, video games, and online interactive computer games, many more children and adolescents are exposed to media with violent content than ever before. (Osofsky, 3)

Watching media violence results in aggressive behavior and can have significant developmental problems in the kids. Animation violence is the depiction of aggressive and horrendous acts through its central characters and situations. It can also depict scenes where after the character remains unharmed even after brutally attacked. Cartoons like *Tom and Jerry*, *Looney Tunes*, *Popeye* etc., have existed for about eight decades. The effect of cartoon violence on young minds is not taken seriously. Cartoon portrays violence in a funny manner and gives the impression that it is natural to hurt anyone or even murder. Children are capable to

distinguish between imagination and reality in cartoons. Parents should keep a tab of what their child is watching and learning. If all the child sees are violent action, then they are likely to end up committing violence. They completely fail to understand the sense of consequence, like if you chop the head of a person like in cartoon, the person in real life will not get up again. "Infants and toddlers who witness violence in their homes or community show excessive irritability, immature behavior, sleep disturbances, emotional distress, fears of being alone, and regression in toileting and language" (Osofsky, 5).

The Central Board of Film Certification of India, monitors and advices directors to remove anything that is offensive, criticizing religious or political establishments, even obscenity. But sadly, this kind of censoring is not applied to children's animation. Children tend to watch violence and horrendous acts and think that they are quite normal. People have mixed opinion about cartoon violence. There are infinite cases about how kids tend to mimic the violence onscreen, and have resulted in deaths. Some people tend to believe that one needs to think about the methods in which kids understand information; time spent in watching, they are actually trying to imitate etc. They think that it was absolutely fine for them while they were kids, so it will be the same for their children as well. In such cases, they tend to forget that in earlier day's violence depicted on television was significantly less, and also the technology was also not that developed. Animation industry has flourished recently, and it is now possible to do anything on screen with the effect VFX or computer-generated images.

There is a depressing scene in one of the episodes of *Tom and Jerry*, where depressed Tom is sitting on the railway track to commit suicide. Jerry becomes upset seeing his friend's condition, thinks that it's better to end one's life than facing problems. Jerry later joins Tom's waiting for an incoming train, the whistling sound of the train increases as it approaches, and the episode ends with their death. Such scenes of depression and committing suicide are not suitable for children. Apart from this episode there are many other episodes explicitly dealing with violence, like sending Tom to space on a firecracker, cutting into multiple pieces, being bombed, cooked and eaten as cannibals etc. Even the fast-moving scenes increase the eye movement and heartbeat of the children, making them more restless all the time. They tend to get bored of the daily life, not filled with such actions; some even go to the extent of imitating of whatever they see on screen. Mickey Mouse cartoons initially were not that violent, but trying to cope up with others, they too fall in the same category.

Morality and values are never delivered, apart from the animal like instincts to act without thinking about the consequences. Similarly, is *Toy story 3*, according to film critic Jordan Hoffman this film is entirely about holocaust. In the film there are scenes which bear a resemblance to Anne Frank and her family's hiding from the Nazi troops. When Andy grows old, they donate his toys to a day care centre, but in the process of being carried away in a box, they see hope in the form of a rainbow above the entrance door. The scene is similar to the Jewish persecution; while being taken in trains to Auschwitz, the prisoners could only see the rainbow above the gate from their wooden bogies. Although Lovin is a teddy bear that smells of strawberries, he represents the Nazi forces- as he decides which toys are to be treated well and which ones are to be punished. He makes sure that solid security keeps them all together, either by acceptance or by force. Buzz, Woody and other toys are eventually shoved into a trash truck by Lovin Bear and his gang while they try to escape from the Sunnyside day care. The garbage truck drags the toys and puts them in a conveyor belt that leads to a giant fire pit. It is similar to Jewish concentration camps, where they are burned alive or put in gas chambers. There is a scene in the film where the toys hold each other's hand as they are carried away to their doom. All these scenes cannot be a mere coincidence, which one may miss. Speaking of Holocaust to children through toys is not at all appropriate. There are other ways of delivering the same message through books or documentaries and not through a medium of Children's' cartoon, which is made primarily for kids. History should be imparted and not by terrifying or scarring them for life.

Some of the recent animations like *Rabbids Invasion*, *Cracked* and *Happy Tree Friends* depict violence that has crossed all limits. In *Happy Tree Friends*, there is an episode called Eyes Cold Lemonade, where the characters cut open eyes and make lemonade out of it. In the process they cut the eyeball, squeeze it over a juicer, mix sugar and drink it. They also serve a glass with a spliced eye on it. The show depicts violence in the extreme limits; after watching this, one cannot stop thinking of it. A child who watches the same program has a more devastating effect; they think it is absolutely fine if you gorge out an eyeball in order to make a juice to drink. Are we teaching children to be Cannibals? Is a question that every adult should answer.

Cracked is another filler cartoon spanning for about one minute between programs, it depicts how an ostrich father takes care of his children (apparently eggs) in the most bizarre form. In the process of saving his children he ends up being cut in to two, chopped, eaten by a crocodile, thrown over a cliff, crushed under a rock etc., but still survives. By watching such programs, children tend to believe what they see, not realizing its consequences if done by themselves. Another example is *Rabbids Invasion* which is a cartoon series depicting three rabbits, they are like aliens who invade our planet and create trouble wherever they go. Initially the show was a video game named Raving Rabbids, but due to excessive demand and million downloads the game was aired in the form of a series. The show makes one think about whether they are rabbits or rabid dogs? One can only come to a consensus that they are nothing less than demons that are created to torment people.

There are many methods in which adults can keep a tab on kid's exposure to media violence. Firstly, by restricting such shows which expose children to more and more violence. Another method is by watching shows along with them, and speaking to them about such situations in real life and its consequences. This will help to a greater extent by making them realize the reality of life than an imaginary world. *Alice in Wonderland* is a good read for any child, but to see a child fall into a rabbit hole trying to follow it- in the hope of reaching an imaginary kingdom, is the last thing that anyone would want to see. Reality and imagination should be made clear to any growing up child. The cartoon industry trying to cope up with the other channels, as well as the lack of getting good scripts, ends up in relaying programs which are like Japanese karate or Kung fu for toddlers.

Another source of violence exposure is video games, there are many gaming cites that provide firearms information, explosive weapons and how to use it in games to murder or defeat the other team. In the process of such games, the kid's character gets affected as well as their outlook to life; addiction is also one of its consequences. Sadly, there is hardly any study about the effects of violent video games. What's more alarming in such cases is that the kid becomes a perpetrator than a mere spectator in games.

The American Association of Paediatrics has come out with multiple recommendations to overcome media violence. It points out that parents should strictly bring down television time and watch programs with their children, so that they can educate their kids regarding what is fiction and not actual. Doctors should literate both parents and about the problems of media violence and inform kids how to see and understand what they see onscreen, that includes cartoons, commercials, games etc. Children may be able to grasp which messages are good and which needs to omit. Both Teachers and parents should educate children about different methods of resolving problems. Doctors should educate the media to become more sensitive to its impact on youngsters.

The significant effects of watching violence kids may become less sensitive to the others suffering, and becomes more afraid of their surroundings and are likely to behave in a violent or intolerable manner. They may become less interested at school, less friendly, lesser involvement in activities and are more likely to become obese. The recent incident about a child being murdered in a toilet washroom by another student, on the whole point of getting a day off at school, clearly points out how violence has entered into the children's personal life. Another incident of a teacher being stabbed by a primary kid in a class room is also an example of how violence is affecting the young minds. It is high time that Sensor Board take necessary steps to stop airing violent content, as well as being responsible citizen, everyone should stop watching such shows.

There are many children's animations which deals with lesser elements of violence like *Shaun the Sheep*, *Mickey Mouse* and Walt Disney cartoons. In *Shaun the Sheep*, there are no words used in the series other than animal noises like woofs, oinks, baa etc., but the message is clearly delivered. Everyone is happy on the farm; they help each other, solve each other's problems and stay together. The plot usually revolves around Shaun, a clever sheep and his friends at the Mossy Bottom Farm; they are mostly fascinated by new gadgets or devices, which end them up in trouble. In spite of all these they stick together and solve the interference trying not to bring in to the notice of the farmer. They dance to the tunes of 'Every day feels like summer with you' in the end, and they go to sleep happily.

I would like to conclude by saying that parents should monitor and pay more attention to their kids and not be a mere observer with them in front of the television, be it for video games, movies and commercial shows. Televisions are considered as secondary babysitters, but they are not passive as one might think.

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