



PARENTS TELEVISION COUNCIL • SPECIAL REPORT • MARCH 2006

# WOLVES IN SHEEP'S CLOTHING

## A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF CHILDREN'S TELEVISION



HOLLYWOOD

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# WOLVES IN SHEEP'S CLOTHING

## A Content Analysis of Children's Television

MARCH 2, 2006

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### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Children today are bombarded by intensely violent images in the movies they watch and the video games they play. Even prime time TV is loaded with violent imagery. But what about programming specifically created for young children?

The Parents Television Council set out to discover exactly what young children are seeing on programming designed uniquely for them. The PTC chose to focus on entertainment programming for school-aged children aged 5-10 on broadcast television and expanded basic cable. Eight networks – four broadcast and four cable – offer programming matching that criteria: ABC, Fox, NBC, WB, ABC Family, Cartoon Network, Disney Channel and Nickelodeon. The PTC focused its analysis on after-school and Saturday morning programming. The analysis covered a three-week period during the summer of 2005 for a total of 443.5 hours of children's programming.

**The results were staggering. In the 443.5 hours of children's programming analyzed by the PTC there were 3488 instances of violence – an average of 7.86 violent incidents per hour. Even when the innocent, "cartoony" violence most of us grew up with (e.g. an anvil falling on Wile E. Coyote's head) is extracted, there were still 2794 instances of violence for an average of 6.30 violent incidents per hour. To put this figure in perspective, consider that in 2002 the six broadcast networks combined averaged only 4.71 instances of violence per hour of prime time programming.\* Thus there is more violence aimed directly at young children than at adults on television today.**

But it is not only violence that is present in today's programming for children. Sexual innuendo is present. Adult language is present. Trash talking, bullying, and disrespect are present. In its analysis of children's television the PTC also found:

- 858 incidents of verbal aggression (e.g. abusive yelling, mean-spirited insults and put-downs) for an average of 1.93 instances per hour.
- 250 incidents of offensive language (such as excretory references or euphemisms for obscene language) for an average of 0.56 instances per hour.
- 662 incidents of disruptive, disrespectful or otherwise problematic attitudes and behaviors for an average of 1.49 instances per hour.
- Of those, 53 were disrespect for authority.
- 275 incidents of sexual content for an average of 0.62 instances per hour.

Looking at the individual networks:

- Although the Cartoon Network had the highest total number of violent incidents, the ABC Family Channel turned out to pack the most punch-per-program, with 318 instances of violence (only 11 of these could be considered "cartoon" violence) for an average of 10.96 violent incidents per episode.
- The Disney Channel had the least-violent children's programming (0.95 incidents per episode).
- The WB had the highest levels of offensive language, verbal abuse, sexual content and offensive/excretory references.
- Fox had the lowest frequency of this content.

Too often we dismiss violence in children's programming as inconsequential; "After all," the argument goes, "I grew up watching *Road Runner* cartoons and I turned out okay." Violence in cartoons, of course, is nothing new. What has changed is that the violence is ubiquitous, often sinister, and in many cases, frighteningly realistic.

Studies have shown exposure to TV violence to be positively associated with aggressive behavior in some children and exposure to sexual content increases the likelihood that children will become sexually active earlier in life. The extended argument implies that exposure to coarse language and disrespectful attitudes will also negatively affect children.

Parents often take it for granted that children's programs are, by definition, child-friendly. This clearly is not always the case. Unfortunately this faulty assumption has led many parents to let their guard down and allow their children to spend hours watching television unsupervised.

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**Young children are especially impressionable, and they learn social norms and behaviors as readily from television as from their peers or parents.**

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Young children are especially impressionable, and they learn social norms and behaviors as readily from television as from their peers or parents.

The "Wolves in Sheep's Clothing" report documents that "children's television" is no safe haven for children and parents must be extremely vigilant as to what their children are watching.

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\* PTC Special Report *TV Bloodbath: Violence on Prime Time Network TV* – December 10, 2003

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# WOLVES IN SHEEP'S CLOTHING

## A Content Analysis of Children's Television

MARCH 2, 2006 • BY KRISTEN FYFE

### I. INTRODUCTION

Children's programming has been around as long as television itself, but until recently, it was confined to Saturday mornings or before school. Today, thanks to a handful of cable channels, cartoons and child-targeted programming are available almost around the clock. In fact, few broadcast networks are even offering original Saturday morning children's programs. Instead they are using series developed by their cable partners to fill that time slot.

In its ten year history, the Parents Television Council has published a number of studies examining the content of prime time network programming and topics of special interest, like Spanish-Language television, original cable, and reality TV; but to date, the PTC has yet to examine programming geared specifically to young children. With this study, the PTC seeks to fill that information gap. With the near 24/7 availability of cartoons and children's programming the PTC determined it was time to analyze what programmers were putting on the air for our children.

Since the earliest days of the medium, social scientists have been researching how children consume and are affected by television – and the results of this research are remarkably consistent. Television does influence behavior in children. Exposure to violent programming begets an inclination to violent behavior.<sup>[1]</sup> Too much time in front of the TV compounds the likelihood of childhood obesity.<sup>[2]</sup> The presence of TVs in children's bedrooms has been linked to poorer academic performance.<sup>[3]</sup> Exposure to sexual themes increases the likelihood that children will experiment with and become sexually active at an earlier age.<sup>[4]</sup>

This study seeks to take these scientifically researched findings and apply them to the content of children's programming. What exactly are children watching when they turn on Cartoon

Network or Nickelodeon? Given that they have round-the-clock access to such programming, which is often rerun, and that research proves that children learn through repetition, what are the over-arching themes present in today's cartoon landscape? What messages are America's children absorbing via the content of children's television?

### II. BACKGROUND

Children's programming has been the subject of analysis for decades. In 1971, the Surgeon General's office compiled studies by various researchers on the effects of televised violence on young viewers. This comprehensive, multi-volume publication known as the *Surgeon General's Report* included the studies *Short-Term Effects of Televised Aggression on Children's Aggressive Behavior* and *Television Violence and Child Aggression: A Follow-up Study*, both of which determined that viewing violence negatively impacted children.<sup>[5]</sup> The Surgeon General, Jessie Steinfeld, expressed his opinion that television was a social phenomena and the summary of his report called for an investigation into previously unexplored areas of television's influence.<sup>[6]</sup>

Since that time literally thousands of studies have been conducted on the impact of television viewing on the behavior of both adults and children. For children's television specifically, research on violence and the amount of television watched is abundant. In 1996, the landmark *National Television Violence Study* showed that 66% of children's programming had violence. Of these, 75% demonstrated unpunished violence, and when violence occurred 58% of victims were not shown experiencing pain. In the study, 46% of all television violence identified took place in children's cartoons. Children's programs were least likely to depict the long-term consequences of violence (5%), and they portray violence in a humorous fashion 68% of the time.<sup>[7]</sup>

The 1990s also saw a host of warnings from the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Psychological Association and other like-minded organizations about the negative effects of watching too much television. In August 1998 the *AAP (American Academy of Pediatrics) News* ran an article by Dr. Donald Shifrin that stated, "For younger viewers, many harmful contextual features were seen most often in cartoons." He went on to add that an average child who watched two hours of cartoons daily would have been exposed to 10,000 violent incidents a year. Currently the American Academy of Pediatrics states that children under two years of age should not watch television at all.[8]

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**Once the envelope is pushed open, all that is left is to push it open a little further.**

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1990s with the influx of Japanese anime. When the *Mighty Morphin' Power Rangers* hit TV screens parents were outraged by the fact that the show seemed to exist solely for the purposes of showing fight scenes. The spread of this style of children's entertainment has been swift. *Pokemon*, *Digimon*, *Dragon Ball Z*, *Yu-Gi-Oh* and the like all feature battles and violence. While some, like *Pokemon*, are more benign than the others, the trend is widespread and *anime*-styled cartoons comprise large amounts of program time. Even some American cartoon offerings, like *The Batman* and *Teen Titans* have been influenced by *anime*'s style and action/violence-packed approach to storytelling.

The 1990s also saw the rise of "gross-out humor" in children's cartoons. Nickelodeon's *Ren and Stimpy* was called a "deranged cartoon series" by the *New York Times* when it went on the air in the early 1990s. Parent's groups decried it. *Rugrats* opened the floodgates for the infusion of bathroom humor in children's programming as well as themes of disobedience and disrespect.

While the popularity of some genres of children's television may quickly fall out of fashion, the same is seldom true for content issues. Once particular themes, or language, or visual images enter into the television landscape, they very rarely retreat. Once the envelope is pushed open, all that is left is to push it open a little further.

With this study on children's television, the Parents Television Council sought to discover just how far open the envelope has been pushed when it comes to what our children are seeing on programming intended specifically for them.

### **III. STUDY PARAMETERS AND METHODOLOGY**

Because children's television and cartoons are no longer confined to Saturday mornings, a decision was made to look at programming airing throughout the week during times children were most likely to watch cartoons. For this study analysts looked at programming targeted primarily to grade school children, 5-10 years-of-age, airing during the after-school hours of 3:00 p.m. – 10:00 p.m. during the week and Saturdays from 7:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.

The PTC analyzed all cable and broadcast networks that regularly air children's programming. These are ABC, Fox, NBC, the WB, ABC Family, Cartoon Network, the Disney Channel, and Nickelodeon. Of these networks, four offered programming throughout the week: Nickelodeon, Cartoon Network, Disney Channel and WB.

Weekly taping comprised an average of 140.5 hours and extended over a three week study period that ran from July 20, 2005 to August 11, 2005 for a total of 443.5 hours of children's programming. In the case of re-runs, which occur frequently in children's television, analysis from the data of the original air date was counted. Any missing episodes were replaced with the next new episode after the end of the study period.

Because children's programming has different content issues than much of what is offered during prime time television, it was necessary to reassess

the content areas PTC analysts would look to review. By studying literature from the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the American Psychological Association, as well as countless studies on the effects of television on children, a picture of what content to look for in children's programming began to emerge. In addition, the PTC conducted an informal survey of Codes of Conduct for private and public elementary schools in geographically diverse parts of the country to assess what language and behaviors are deemed inappropriate for children in school. Content issues fall broadly into one of seven categories: Violence, Verbal Abuse, Foul Language, Problematic Attitudes and Behavior, Sexual Content, Offensive/Excretory Content and Social Institutions. With this study the PTC seeks to quantify these content issues and also to provide some qualitative analysis.

## Categories of Content:

Violent behavior was further divided into one of several subcategories:

- ✓ **Cartoon Violence** (à la classic cartoons like *Tom and Jerry* or *The Roadrunner* where violence may include running into a door or having an anvil dropped on your head)
- ✓ **Fantasy Violence** (any violent actions that involve robots/aliens/fantasy creatures/ghosts, etc.)
- ✓ **Physical Violence** (to include hitting, punching, kicking, pushing, shoving, fighting, drowning, torture, cannibalism, suicide, kidnapping)
- ✓ **Martial Arts**
- ✓ **Use of Weapons** (to include guns, knives, fantasy weapons [lasers, etc] or any other foreign object)
- ✓ **Violence involving objects** (to include crashes, explosions, destruction of property)
- ✓ **Fire**
- ✓ **Implied violence** (the violence happens off screen or is heard and not seen)
- ✓ **Death implied or depicted**
- ✓ **Graphic descriptions**

**[A note on the analysis of violence:** The PTC recognizes that not all violence is created equal which is why in the context of this study the

distinction between cartoon violence and fantasy violence was made. Analysts did not log individual punches/kicks but rather sequences in which these types of actions took place.]

**Verbal Abuse is comprised of the following subcategories:**

- ✓ **Verbal Aggression** (such as abusive yelling)
- ✓ **Threats**
- ✓ **Insults, mean-spirited name calling, and putdowns** ("stupid," "idiot," and "loser," for example)

**Offensive Language included these subcategories:**

- ✓ **Toilet Humor** (such as references to bodily functions/ body parts)
- ✓ **Euphemisms for vulgar or profane language**
- ✓ **Vulgar or profane language** ("ass," "hell," "damn")
- ✓ **Mild language** ("suck" or "butt," for example)

**Problematic Attitudes and Behaviors, the broadest of the content areas, included the following subcategories:**

- ✓ **Defiance/disobedience**
- ✓ **Disrespect for authority/parents**
- ✓ **Lying**
- ✓ **Cheating**
- ✓ **Stealing**
- ✓ **Disruptive behavior/tantrums**
- ✓ **Harmful pranks**
- ✓ **Mob/gang activity**
- ✓ **Bullying**
- ✓ **Negative peer pressure**
- ✓ **Computer related hacking**
- ✓ **Racism**

**Sexual Content** was defined to include the following:

- ✓ Adult subtext, sexual innuendo, double entendre
- ✓ Nudity
- ✓ Partial nudity
- ✓ Cross-dressing
- ✓ References to homosexuality
- ✓ Puberty issues
- ✓ Promiscuous behavior
- ✓ Sexual activity implied
- ✓ Scant/revealing/inappropriate clothing
- ✓ Underwear shown

**The Offensive/Excretory Content** category refers primarily to issues of bodily functions and includes:

- ✓ Vomit
- ✓ Spitting/drooling
- ✓ Flatulence
- ✓ Burping
- ✓ Nose-picking, eating of or depiction of nasal mucus
- ✓ Defecation
- ✓ Defecation implied/mentioned

**The Social Institutions** category included the following topics:

- ✓ Parental authority/responsibility
- ✓ Portrayal of parents in negative light
- ✓ Family
- ✓ Parent/child relationships
- ✓ Adult/child relationships
- ✓ Educational Authority
- ✓ Law enforcement
- ✓ Other authority figures
- ✓ Friendship
- ✓ Religion
- ✓ Religious symbolism
- ✓ Occultism/witchcraft/paganism
- ✓ Divorce
- ✓ War

## NETWORKS AND TIME PERIODS IN STUDY PERIOD

### WEEKDAYS (MONDAY – FRIDAY)

3:00 p.m. – 10:00 p.m.	..... Nickelodeon and Cartoon Network
3:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.	..... WB
3:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.	..... Disney Channel

### SATURDAYS

7:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.	..... Nickelodeon and Cartoon Network
11:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.	..... Disney Channel
7:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.	..... ABC Family Channel
10:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.	..... NBC
7:00 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.	..... Fox
8:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.	..... ABC
7:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.	..... WB

## IV. OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS

A 2004 study conducted by Harvard University found that animated movies have much more violent content than their live-action counterparts. The PTC's findings indicate the same is true of children's television. In fact, as a whole, the networks whose children's programming is comprised of primarily live action shows (Fox, NBC) have overwhelmingly less questionable content. While Cartoon Network contained the most incidents of violence, when averaged out per-episode the ABC Family Channel (10.96 instances per hour) ended up being ranked the most violent network, followed by the WB (8.73 instances per hour). Now that the WB has done away with its children's weekday programming block, ABC Family Channel and Cartoon Network will likely reign supreme as the networks with the most violent content.

The least violent network overall was the Disney Channel, with an average of 0.95 instances per hour. Ironically, the most and least violent network are both owned by the same parent company.

## **Major Findings Overall and By Network:**

- ✓ 3488 incidents of violence for an average of 7.86/hour.
- ✓ Within that broad category, there were 694 incidents of cartoon violence, 784 incidents of fantasy violence, and 821 incidents of physical violence.
- .....
- ✓ 858 Incidents of verbal abuse for an average of 1.93/hour.
- ✓ Children's programming on the WB featured the highest levels of verbal abuse with 1.44 instances per episode. Children's programming on Fox contained the lowest levels of verbal abuse with an average of only 0.24 instances per episode.
- ✓ Putdowns and mean-spirited name calling (dweeb, geek, jerk, moron) were the predominant issue with 662 incidents recorded in the study period. This averaged out to 1.49 occurrences per hour.

- ✓ There were 260 total instances of foul language for an average of 0.59 per hour.
- ✓ The WB featured the highest levels of foul language, with an average of 0.48 instances per episode.
- ✓ Neither NBC nor the ABC Family Channel contained any questionable language.
- ✓ “Stupid” was the most used questionable word, followed by “loser” and “butt.”
- .....
- ✓ There were 662 incidents of problematic attitudes/behaviors for an average of 1.49 per hour.
- ✓ The most frequent behavioral issues were lying (106 incidents), bullying (165).
- ✓ The programming on ABC featured the highest levels of problematic attitudes and behaviors with an average of 2.27 instances per episode.
- ✓ Fox programs contained no problematic attitudes or behaviors.
- .....
- ✓ There were 275 instances of sexual content for an average of 0.62 per hour
- ✓ Adult subtext, innuendo and double entendre (128) were the most prevalent form of sexual content followed by nudity and partial nudity (55).
- ✓ The WB had the highest levels of sexual material with .41 instances per episode. Fox had the least, with 0.03 instances per episode.
- .....
- ✓ There were 295 incidents of offensive/excretory content for an average of 0.66 per hour
- ✓ The WB had the highest levels of offensive/excretory content with 1.17 instances per episode, followed by ABC Family with 0.41 instances per episode.
- ✓ Fox had the lowest levels of offensive/excretory content with 0.03 instances per episode.
- .....
- ✓ Parents were treated with respect more often than not in children’s cartoons, but not by much. Parents were portrayed positively 106 times and negatively 94 times.

- ✓ Teachers and educational authority fared worse. Teachers and school were portrayed negatively by a nearly 3:1 margin.
- ✓ References to the occult, witchcraft or cults were made 81 times. Some programs are built entirely around the theme of witchcraft.
- ✓ ABC had the most frequent references to social institutions with 1.33 instances per episode, but more than half of these were positive treatments.
- ✓ Nickelodeon had the most negative treatments of social institutions.

## **Major Findings by Show:**

- ✓ The WB's *Teen Titans* had the most violent content with 21.7 incidents per episode.
- ✓ Programs containing no violence include Nickelodeon's *Hi Jinks*; *Endurance and Trading Spaces Boys and Girls* on NBC; *Awesome Adventures*, *Magical Do Re Me*, *The Menu*, and *Wild About* on Fox.
- ✓ The WB's *Foster's Home for Imaginary Friends* contained the highest frequency of verbally abusive language with an average of 4.3 incidents per episode.
- ✓ Programs containing no verbally abusive language include *Hi Jinks* and *Rugrats* on Nickelodeon; *Krypto the Superdog*, *Pokemon*, *Scooby Doo*, *Static Shock*, and *Tom and Jerry* on the Cartoon Network; *The Batman* on the WB; *Digimon DM*, *Digimon RD*, *Dragon Booster*, *Fantastic 4*, *Power Rangers Dino Thunder*, *Power Rangers*, *Light Speed Rescue*, *Super Robot Monkey Team*, and *W.I.T.C.H.* on ABC Family.
- ✓ Nickelodeon's *Danny Phantom* contained the most frequent use of offensive language with an average of 1.7 incidents per episode.
- ✓ Programs containing no offensive language include *Hi Jinks* and *Rugrats* on Nickelodeon; *Phil of the Future* on Disney; *Hi Hi Puffy Ami*, *Krypto the Superdog*, *Pokemon*, *Scooby Doo*, *Static Shock*, *Tom and Jerry*, *Totally Spies*, and *Yu Gi Oh* on the Cartoon Network; *Mega Man*, *Sabrina*

*the Animated Series*, and *The Batman* on the WB; all of the ABC Family programs except for *Battle B-Daman* and *Power Rangers SPD*; all of the NBC programs; *Awesome Adventures*, *Pet Keeping*, *Shaman King*, *Sonic X*, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, *The Menu*, and *Wild About* on Fox; and *Lizzie McGuire* and *Proud Family* on ABC.

- ✓ ABC's *Lizzie McGuire* featured the most frequent instances of problematic attitudes and behaviors, with 7 incidents per episode.
- ✓ Programs containing no examples of this behavior include *Hi Jinks*, *My Life as a Teenage Robot*, *Rocket Power*, and *Zoey 101* on Nickelodeon; *Jake Long American Dragon* and *Lilo and Stitch* on Disney; *Scooby Doo*, *Static Shock*, and *Yu Gi Oh* on the Cartoon Network; *Digimon DM*, *Digimon RD*, *Shinzo*, *Super Robot Monkey Team*, and *W.I.T.C.H.* on ABC Family; *Trading Spaces Boys and Girls* on NBC; all of the Fox programming; and *Lilo and Stitch* on ABC
- ✓ The WB's *The Batman* had the most sexual content with an average of 1.33 incidents per episode.
- ✓ Programs containing no sexual content include Nickelodeon's *Hi Jinks*, *My Life as a Teenage Robot*, *Ned's Declassified School Survival Guide*, and *Unfabulous*; Disney's *Jake Long American Dragon*, *Brandy and Mr. Whiskers*, *Buzz* on *Maggie*, and *Lilo and Stitch*; the Cartoon Network's *Cartoon Top 5*, *Juniper Lee*, *Pokemon*, *Scooby Doo*, *Static Shock*, and *Tom and Jerry*; the WB's *Jackie Chan*, and *Yu Gi Oh*; all of the programming on ABC Family except *Battle B-Daman* and *Digimon DM*; NBC's *Jeff Corwin*, *Trading Spaces Boys and Girls*, *Time Warp*, *Trio*, and *Tutenstein*; Fox's *Sonic X*, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, *The Menu*, *Wild About* and *Winx Club*; and ABC's *Even Stevens* and *Lilo and Stitch*.
- ✓ The WB's *Foster's Home for Imaginary Friends* had the highest frequency of offensive or excretory content with an average of 3.66 incidents per episode.
- ✓ Programs containing no offensive or excretory content include *Avatar*, *Hi Jinks*, *My Life as a*

*Teenage Robot, Rugrats, Unfabulous, and Zoey 101* on Nickelodeon; *Jake Long American Dragon, Braceface, and Lilo and Stitch* on Disney; *Krypto the Superdog, Juniper Lee, Pokemon, Scooby Doo, Static Shock, Tom and Jerry, and Yu Gi Oh* on the Cartoon Network; *The Batman and Yu Gi Oh* on the WB; *Battle B-Daman, Power Rangers SPD, and W.I.T.C.H.* on ABC Family; *Darcy's Wildlife, Jeff Corwin, and Trading Spaces* Boys and Girls on NBC; all of the Fox programs except for *Awesome Adventures*; and ABC's *Even Stevens, Proud Family* and *That's So Raven*.

- ✓ References to social institutions were most frequent on the WB's *Teen Titans* with 2.6 incidents per episode.
- ✓ Programs with no such content were *Catscratch, Hi Jinks, Ned's Declassified School Survival Guide, Rugrats, and Unfabulous* on Nickelodeon; *Phil of the Future* on the Disney Channel; The Cartoon Network's *Ed, Edd and Eddy, Juniper Lee, Pokemon, Scooby Doo, and Tom and Jerry*; the WB's *Foster's Home for Imaginary Friends, The Batman*; ABC Family's *Digimon DM, Digimon RD, Fantastic 4, Power Rangers Dino Thunder, Power Rangers SPD, Shinzo, and Super Robot Monkey Team*; all NBC programming except *Darcy's Wildlife* and *Tutenstein*; all Fox programming except *Awesome Adventures, Magical Do Re Mi* and *Winx Club*; and all ABC programming except *Lilo and Stitch*.

[Understand that an "hour" of children's programming is comprised of approximately 40 minutes of program content. Ninety-nine percent of children's programming is aired in 30-minute shows. The statistical analysis on a network basis details the incidents of occurrence by episode.]

## V. CONTENT EXAMPLES

### A. VIOLENCE

Much of the violence that occurs in contemporary cartoons falls under the umbrella of "fantasy violence." The fact that it falls under a "fantasy" realm does not diminish its impact on the viewer. The scene described below from the WB's *Xiaolin Showdown* is typical of fantasy violence and martial arts sequences on all the networks studied.

☞ **The good warrior and Chase battle using their double bladed spears. They run towards each other and begin swinging. Chase swings twice but the warrior blocks both with his spear. The warrior does a back flip to create some space between him and Chase. Chase immediately charges again and the warrior tries to stab him by thrusting one of his spear heads at his stomach. Chase jumps in the air avoiding the attack. On his way back down he begins swinging at the warrior. The warrior blocks several quick swings with his spear until Chase lands behind him and knocks him to the ground. Chase pushes a lever causing the floor to open in a giant circle. Where the floor was there is now a pit of fire in the shape of a ring. Chase jumps on the warrior who is still on the ground. With his foot Chase slides the warrior towards the fire. The warrior turns his spear at Chase and pulls a trigger on the handle. The spearhead launches from the handle hitting Chase and knocking him backwards. Both the warrior and Chase place their weapons down and begin to fight in hand-to-hand combat. Chase charges at the warrior and in a flash they both begin to swing and block each other's punches. Chase then uses his tail to try and hit the warrior, but is blocked three times. After several swings, Chase hits the warrior in the chest with both of his fists. The warrior is flung backwards into a wall and then falls towards the fire. The warrior lands on a ledge and quickly flips back towards Chase. In the air, the warrior begins to spin. While spinning in the air the warrior slaps Chase nine times across the face. Chase starts to get back up but the warrior kicks him across the face, causing him to slide toward**

**the edge of the ring. Chase kicks another lever. This lever causes a maze of mirrors to come out of the floor. Chase grabs the warrior from behind and throws him into one of the mirrors. Holding onto the mirror the warrior kicks Chase. He is thrown by the kick into a mirror directly behind him. The warrior, with his power, begins to glow. Chase, trying to sneak behind the warrior, crawls towards his back. At the last moment the warrior turns around and uses his power to hit Chase.** [August 13, 2005]

A frequent criticism of cartoon violence is that more often than not the violence is sanitized and no consequences are shown. This is the norm on Cartoon Network's *Teen Titans*, one of the most violent shows on that network.

☛ **The evil Slade and Robin are involved in a graphic and intense fight. In one scene Robin attempts to punch Slade. Slade grabs his fist and squeezes it. A crunching sound occurs as if he is breaking Robin's hand. Robin is unharmed.** [July 21, 2005]

While violence is not new to cartoons, the nature of the violence rendered in today's children's programming is often intense and of an insidious nature, like this scene from *Totally Spies!* on Cartoon Network

☛ **Dr. Grey locks Jerry and Clover in a glass jail cell and releases rats, leaving them to psychological torture.** [July 28, 2005]

The influence of Japanese *anime* on children's cartoons is quite evident. The following examples show the ways this influence is played out. This very intense scene took place on Fox's *Shaman King*:

☛ **Zeke and Yoh continue fighting. Yoh is knocked down many times and is worn down. Finally, Zeke knocks Yoh's sword away and then kicks him in the head, knocking him out. Zeke then yanks Yoh off the ground by his hair then reaches into Yoh's chest. Yoh is screaming. Zeke takes Yoh's soul and puts it in his own body. Yoh appears dead.** [August 13, 2005]

*Power Rangers* (now airing on the ABC Family Channel) has been criticized for almost a decade for its use of gratuitous violence. In fact, most content issues with the *Power Rangers* franchise have to do with violence. The following scene from *Power Rangers Dino Thunder* is typical.

☛ **In one giant battle between eleven Power Rangers and an evil army there are over 20 explosions. This includes some of the monsters actually exploding themselves. The evil army and most of the Rangers have swords. There are several weapons used, like motorcycles with guns, handguns, swords, and lasers.** [July 30, 2005]

## B. LANGUAGE

Language issues in contemporary cartoons primarily involve verbal abuse (name calling/put downs) and what many parents call "potty mouth" or mild swearing and euphemisms for adult foul language. Verbal abuse was most evident in this study and it ran the gamut from kids calling each other names, to adults putting each other down, to kids verbally disrespecting authority figures. "Butt" is by far the most common "potty mouth" word used, most often with reference to having one's "butt kicked" in some fashion. The use of euphemisms is also evidence that writers are coyly playing with language.

## EUPHEMISMS

From *The Grim Adventures of Billy and Mandy* on Cartoon Network:

☛ **Grim gets shocked and crumbles into a pile of ashes. He says, "Help me pull myself together before my ash gets washed away."** [July 23, 2005]

From Nickelodeon's *The Amanda Show*:

☛ **During a sketch about a substitute teacher in a class of kids with super powers, a boy with rhyming powers is told not to rhyme by the teacher who says, "One more time and you're**

**out of this class!" He responds, "If I get detention my dad will kick my ['ass' is implied]."** [August 1, 2005]

During the study period Nickelodeon aired an episode of *Sponge Bob Square Pants* entitled "Sailor Mouth," the subject of which is foul language.

☛ **Innocent Sponge Bob doesn't understand the dirty word graffiti he sees on a dumpster but Patrick tells him it's a "sentence enhancer" for when you want to talk fancy. The rest of the episode features Sponge Bob and Patrick using bleeped foul language ["fuck," "asshole," etc]. The bleeps are made to sound like a dolphin which makes the whole thing seem humorous. At the end Sponge Bob and Patrick realize the words are bad and promise to never use them again but the episode ends with them telling Momma Krabs the 13 bad words Mr. Krabs has just said. All are punished by Momma Krabs for "talking like sailors."** [August 1, 2005]

## PUT-DOWNS

From Disney Channel's *Even Stevens* a disturbing use of language between an adult and child:

☛ **Louis dumps a bucket of water over coach's head to celebrate Twitty's great pitching.**  
**Coach: "IDIOT! We're at the top of the 5th. We have two innings to go!"** [August 3, 2005]

Themes of bullying are often associated with name calling and put-downs. This scene from Nickelodeon's *Unfabulous* paints a common picture.

☛ **Addie and her new friend from the popular clique are walking into a classroom and Geena kicks a cart across the room leaving a cord stretching across the floor. Addie trips over the cord and falls down.**

**Geena: "Careful, Addie. It's hard to kiss Maris' butt and walk at the same time."**

**Addie: "Eli, an AV geek is trying to speak to me."**

**Maris takes Addie off and tells her about leaving her old friends behind for the sake of**

**being popular. She asks Addie if she knew a girl name Mary Fairy.**

**Maris: "And why should you have, she was a loser. ...You can't climb to the top without stepping on a few losers."** [July 20, 2005]

Nickelodeon's *Fairly Odd Parents* is replete with uses of put downs.

☛ **Wanda: "Jorgen said he had the perfect job for those pointy-head freaks."** [August 9, 2005]

Disney's *Proud Family*, one of the most frequently aired programs on the network's schedule, is rife with disrespectful language and put-downs, many of them adult-to-adult. While the main characters, Sugar Momma and Oscar, are usually the ones trading insults, the following scene paints a disturbing adult interaction.

☛ **Oscar coaches Penny's baseball team. All the parents of the players are angry because Oscar makes them sell Proud Snacks and doesn't really teach them anything about baseball or teamwork.**

**Mr. Cheng: "No, you're teaching them how to be a loser like you."**

**Oscar suggests a different parent coach the team if they don't like how he is coaching. He even asks Mr. Cheng.**

**Mr. Cheng: "No, Proud. We all have real jobs, you're the only loser with spare time."**

**Oscar: "That's right, until one of you clowns want to step up, you better step off."** [July 25, 2005]

## DISRESPECT FOR PARENTS/ AUTHORITY

From Disney's *Sister, Sister*:

☛ **Allison can't come to the party because she is grounded for mouthing-off to her mom. While she is on the phone, you hear her say to her mom, "Shut up mother and get out of my face!"** [August 8, 2005]

## C. OFFENSIVE/EXCRETORY CONTENT

The frequent references to bodily functions in today's children's television is a telling indication of just how crass this genre has become. It's no secret that many children find bodily functions a source of endless hilarity. Gross-out humor is a kind of hallmark of childhood. But some of what is on television, under the guise of "entertaining children" goes beyond the pale.

From Cartoon Network's *The Grim Adventures of Billy and Mandy* (It should be noted that the character Grim is a cartoon depiction of the Grim Reaper.):

- ☛ **Billy is getting frustrated with all the rules of the house. After Grim tells him that he can't break the rules Billy says, "Here's what I think of your stupid rules," and proceeds to smack his butt. Billy passes gas in Grim's face and then says that he needs to change his pants. It is understood that he has soiled his pants.** [July 20, 2005]
- ☛ **Mandy stands next to the "Future Plumbers of America" stand. There is a man there with his buttocks showing from the top of his pants. As Mandy walks away you hear the sound of flatulence.** [July 20, 2005]
- ☛ **Billy and the cat are sitting in the bathroom. Billy is admiring all of the hairballs the cat has vomited. Grim walks in and slips on the vomit.** [July 20, 2005]
- ☛ **Billy sticks his entire hand in his nose pulls out some mucus and throws it.** [July 22, 2005]
- ☛ **Billy's dad picks his nose. He picks it so much that he pulls his brain out, and, thinking his brain is mucus, he eats it.** [July 27, 2005]

From Nickelodeon's *Fairly Odd Parents*:

- ☛ **Francis (a bully): "I know you're here Turner. I'll find you even if I have to turn over every defenseless baby here."**  
**He goes around picking up babies while looking for Timmy. He picks up Timmy, who has been turned into a baby by his Fairy Godparents and Timmy vomits green goo all over Francis' face.** [July 23, 2005]

From ABC Family Channel's *W.I.T.C.H.*:

- ☛ **Blunk is shown with mucus dripping from his nostrils. He soaks his feet in a tub of water. His mother bends over and tastes the water. He coughs, again spewing mucus from his nose.** [July 23, 2005]

## D. PROBLEMATIC ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIORS

This is a broad category in which analysts looked at negative, though easily imitated, behaviors and attitudes that children are exposed to in television programming. The content issues that appeared here with the most frequency centered on themes of Bullying, Peer Pressure, and Defiance or Disrespect. It should be noted bullying behavior was much more violent in the animated programs than in the live-action programs.

### BULLYING

From Nickelodeon's *Zoey 101* (live action):

- ☛ **Zoey's little brother, Dustin, is a 6th grader in an 8th grade geometry class. During the math class, the young boy corrects a bully and immediately after class takes off running because he knows the older kid will be after him. He runs into the boy and is told that he must do the boy's homework in all of his classes. Keith, who is much larger, tells Dustin that if his homework is not done, "bad things will happen."** [July 25, 2005]

From Disney's *Lizzie McGuire* (live action):

- ☛ **Claire and Kate come over to say "hi" to Lizzie and make fun of her for running against Claire for class president.**  
**Claire: "Lizzie McGuire, my little opponent."**  
**Lizzie: "Hi Claire. Kate."**  
**Kate: "Loser."**  
**Kate: "Cute in a loser sort of way."**  
**Claire sticks out her hand and puts it in Lizzie's face.**

**Miranda:** "She's giving you the hand."

**Claire:** "Bottom line: I'm popular and you're not, so I win." [August 5, 2005]

From Disney's *Braceface* (animated):

☛ **A group of students are looking and laughing at a giant picture of Sharon picking her nose and Maria tugging at her underwear. The whole crowd is laughing at Sharon and the picture.**

**Boy in green shirt:** "Hey, there she is in person! The Picker!"

**Sharon:** "Does that say, 'Digging for gold, Spitz?' It's not me! I mean it's me, but it's not me. That's a digitally enhanced picture of me. Where did she get a picture of me? It's not my hand! I don't pick my nose!"

**Maria:** "It's okay. Don't worry, things like this blow over."

**Sharon:** "Maria!"

**Maria:** "'Wong and her wedgies.' Hey, I'm not really doing that. Make it stop. That's not me doing that!"

**Nina:** "Hope you guys like the slideshow as much as everyone else. Isn't it amazing what you can do with a new computer and scanner?"

**Sharon:** "Where did you get pictures of us?"

**Nina:** "You like? Let's just say I befriended all the right people on the yearbook staff."

**Maria:** "You know what this means, right? Revenge time."

**Sharon:** "My thoughts exactly." [July 25, 2005]

From Nickelodeon's *The Fairly Odd Parents* (animated):

☛ **Francis:** "Hey Turner, some kids I was whaling on told me about your 'F'. So I'm here to add injury to insult."

**Timmy:** "Don't you mean insult to injury?"

**Francis:** "Not the way I do it! Guess what I have behind my back? Come now, don't be shy, there are no wrong answers."

**Timmy:** "A puppy."

**Francis:** "So close, but alas, wrong. It's a fist!"

**Francis punches Jimmy into the locker.** [July 23, 2005]

From Nickelodeon's *Danny Phantom* (animated):

☛ **Danny:** "I'll show you a curse!" He makes himself invisible. He then follows the main bully down the hall and inhabits the bully's body. He makes the bully smash his head into a locker bank repeatedly and then dunks his head in a mop bucket. He continues inhabiting the bully's body and makes him throw his lunch at a snobby girl. [July 23, 2005]

## DISRESPECT FOR PARENTS / AUTHORITY

From Disney's *Lizzie McGuire*:

☛ **Matt is sitting in the kitchen on a stool while Sam is pacing back and forth, aggravated with Matt's behavior. Jo is cleaning the dishes at the sink. She has given over the discipline of Matt to her husband, Sam.**

**Sam:** "Your behavior, your attitude... are just so bad. I really, I don't know what I'm going to do with you, Matt."

**Matt:** "Be Zen-like, do nothing."

**Sam:** "That is exactly the attitude I'm talking about. What would your mother do in this situation?"

**Matt:** "What is the situation, exactly?"

**Sam:** "Well you put our garden hose in the Lippin's mailbox, you decided you wanted to play mudslinger in the Dennis's yard and you gave Coco a mohawk."

**Matt:** "Hey it was hot outside. I though I was doing Coco a favor."

**Sam:** "Alright, that's it. Go to your room."

**Matt:** "My room?"

**Sam:** "Yes."

**Matt:** "That's it? That's my punishment?"

**Sam:** "Hey, I'm just getting started."

**Matt: "Okay, so when do you think you'll be finished then?"**

**Sam: "That's it! GO!" [July 28, 2005]**

From ABC's *Phil of the Future*:

☛ **Pim is tardy coming to class. Her teacher, Miss Winston, confronts her.**

**Miss Winston: "Pim Diffy. You're fifteen minutes tardy. What's your excuse this time?"**

**Pim: "A long check-out line at the library. How's that frost ya?"**

**Miss Winston: "Frost ya? I'm sorry, Pim. But I'm not from Funkytown."**

**Pim: "Too bad. You should come visit sometime."**

**Miss Winston: "Since my transfer here you have been tardy every single day."**

**During this entire scene Pim's behavior is snide and disrespectful. She wears headphones, which are blasting music, throughout the scene. [July 23, 2005]**

## THEFT / PEER PRESSURE

From Disney's *That's So Raven*:

☛ **Raven asks where Cory was since he was late getting home. Cory claims he was hanging out with "Darrell and the cool crew" and that they were doing things that Raven wouldn't understand. He then takes out the key chain he stole from the store and starts twirling it around his finger. Cory struts out of the kitchen, very proud of himself. [July 20, 2005]**

☛ **Cory admits to Raven that the reason he is so jumpy is because he stole the key chain. He admits to stealing because "all the other kids were doing it." Raven calls Cory a "spineless little punk" but promises not to tell their parents if he goes back to the store to return what he stole. [July 20, 2005]**

## LYING

Many of the children's shows deal with themes and storylines involving the characters telling a lie. In

the vast majority of these shows the lies are uncovered and the perpetrators of the lies pay consequences. However, one show stood out from the others in this regard. NBC's *Endurance 3: Hawaii* is a show premised on the popular adult program *Survivor*. What is disturbing about this show is that it feeds all the typical stereotypes of adolescence: popular, pretty teens vs. unattractive, nerdy teens. Further, because it draws so heavily from the *Survivor* formula, the contestants in this show use the same strategies – lying and betrayal – to win in this game as well.

## E. SEXUAL CONTENT

One of the more disturbing trends noticed in this study of children's television was the amount of adult-oriented subtext that was laced throughout scripts of both the animated and live-action programs. Perhaps this trend has been spawned by similar approaches in movies where scripts seem to be written on two levels, one for the children and one for the adults. Perhaps producers think that if they can entertain parents with double entendres and innuendo the parents will encourage the children to watch. Whatever the reason, sexual content is present in children's programming.

From the WB's *Foster's Home for Imaginary Friends*:

☛ **The episode "Berry Scary" features a girl monster falling in love with the main character, Bloo. However it is told with a deeply disturbing *Fatal Attraction*-style relationship theme. Berry makes cakes, scrapbooks, paintings, etc. of Bloo and is obsessed with him. When Mac, Bloo's friend, enters the picture Berry becomes psychotically jealous and violent. Throughout the episode "romantic" music plays when Berry is falling in love with Bloo, but *Psycho*-style music plays whenever Berry is angry and taking her revenge. In one scene Berry becomes psychotic.**

**Mac: "Don't take this the wrong way, but I'm starting to get the feeling maybe you don't want me around."**

**Berry: "Oh, don't be silly. You're Bloo's best friend."**

**Berry pulls out a huge butcher knife. A musical "sting" accompanies the gesture. As Berry talks she swings the knife on each word she emphasizes which is accompanied by a "slashing" sound effect. Each time she swings her teeth sharpen and her eyes bulge crazily.**

**Berry: "I know Bloo's feelings for me could only ever be a FRACTION of what they are for you. Some might say you're really CUTTING... INTO...MY TIME...WITH BLOO! Just as I'm CARVING out a nice little NICHE for myself. But not me. I'd never say that." [July 30, 2005]**

From Cartoon Network's *Totally Spies!*:

- ☛ **An ad for sun block shows an oiled up woman, in a skimpy bikini, boasting about the sunscreen. Men in the background gawk at her. [August 4, 2005]**

From Nickelodeon's *Fairly Odd Parents*:

- ☛ **Timmy wants to use his magic copier to make the things in his "dad's magazines" real. When he pulls out the magazines they are titled "Under the Bed Monthly." [August 1, 2005]**

From Nickelodeon's *Danny Phantom*:

- ☛ **Four ghosts appear and attack Danny in a store. One of the ghosts is dressed in a black leather bra and black leather boy shorts. [July 29, 2005]**

From Nickelodeon's *Sponge Bob Square Pants*:

- ☛ **In order to entertain children, Sponge Bob does a series of things to cause himself physical pain. He rips his face off with toilet paper and runs over his tongue with a truck. He hires a man in, what looks like leather bondage gear, to hit him on the head with a big hammer and drop a wrecking ball on him. The man in leather ties Sponge Bob up and forces him to eat lima beans. The man then rips Sponge Bob in half. [July 30, 2005]**

Disney's *Sister, Sister* had sexual content falling into a number of categories, from references to pornography to innuendo:

☛ **Kids at a party hack their way into Ray's computer and sign him up for a "Big Babe" website. One of the kids says, "I hope you're into big women. I just signed you up for the Big Babe bulletin board." [August 8, 2005]**

☛ **Policeman: Do you give cops a discount? My significant other and I need a limo for the Gay Policeman's Ball."**

**Ray: "Uh....sure...yeah."**

**Policeman: "I think it's great you have such a liberal attitude."**

**Ray: "Well, I pride myself in being an open-minded kind of guy, able to see everyone's point of view... make no judgments." [August 1, 2005]**

☛ **Lisa falls down and hurts her back while getting ready for her date. When Terrence gets there, he starts rubbing her back and Lisa moans and groans.**

**Lisa: "Have you ever done this before?"**

**Terrence: "Not with anyone as pretty as you."**

**Lisa: "You have done this before!"**

**He feeds her a melon and then talks about choosing the best melon.**

**Terrence: "You gotta' get real close (he moves closer) and feel it. Then you gotta smell it."**

**Lisa: "Mmmmm."**

**Terrence: "Of course, the skin should be firm but supple."**

**Lisa: "Just the way I like it."**

**Terrence: "And it should want to give..."**

**Lisa: "Oh, it wants to give." [August 27, 2005]**

## F. SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS

In this category analysts looked for content that dealt with institutions like religion and educational authority, and treatment of parents and adult authority figures. School and teachers were often

treated with disrespect, but what is most troubling about this is the ease with which these disrespectful attitudes and behaviors could be imitated by children. This category also encompasses themes like witchcraft and the occult which run counter to societal norms. One of the most consistent themes was the use of satanic characters.

From Cartoon Network's *Codename: Kids Next Door*:

- ☞ **The entire series paints adults as evil and manipulative and posits that children must defy authority to "be cool." One of the most "evil" adults is a character called "Father." In a defining bit of dialogue in an episode titled "Operation C.L.O.S.E.T." Number One, the leader of the KND says to an adult, "What makes you think I would trust an adult?!"** [August 4, 2005]

From WB's *Xiaolin Showdown*:

- ☞ **Jack makes the Xiaolin's "greatest fears" appear. Clay becomes his grandmother. She is hunchbacked, with a quadruple chin, old-fashioned glasses, liver spots and moles down both arms and all over her face. She has huge, sagging breasts, toothless gums and gigantic fingernails. She pinches his cheek and tries to kiss him. (This scene is indicative of the series' general treatment of the elderly as filthy and disgusting.)** [July 30, 2005]

From Cartoon Network's *Teen Titans*:

- ☞ **In a series of four episodes in which the Teen Titans are supposed to save the world, Biblical themes are quite strong. In an episode entitled, "The Prophecy," Slade (the bad guy) wears the "mark of the scath" on his head and explains that it will be popular very soon. This is coupled with a foretelling of the end of the world and is similar to the Biblical account of the end of the world in which people will take the "mark of the beast." In an episode entitled "The End Part 3" the entire show is rendered very darkly.**

**Another bad guy, Trigon, resembles a common depiction of Satan and his clones are called "inner demons." The setting is colored only in red and black.** [July 16, 22, 25, 2005]

## VI. CONCLUSION

Violence, bullying, name calling, bathroom humor and sexual innuendo/subtext are the overarching themes present in the landscape of contemporary children's television. Interestingly, a survey of any number of Codes of Conduct for school systems will reflect rules that specifically deal with violence, bullying, language and sex. Do cartoons merely reflect the current culture, or are they tools of acculturation through which children learn about the world around them? Either way, the messages children are receiving in their daily doses of animation raise concerns.

Violence is not new in cartoons. Critics of studies on cartoon violence jump to make that argument. Tom and Jerry repeatedly hurt each other. Wile E. Coyote was a frequent victim of his own attempts to dispose of the Road Runner, and Daffy Duck was on the receiving end of Elmer Fudd's shotgun blasts hundreds of times. Even the earliest Mickey Mouse renderings featured the Disney icon in violent situations. What is different about the violence in today's cartoons? First, the animation techniques employed today are far superior and more realistic than those used in the heyday of *Tom and Jerry*. Secondly, the violence and the themes presented are much more intense and graphic. Third, cartoons, and the accompanying violence, are ever-present because the cartoons are always available.

But it is not only violence that is present in today's programming for children. Sexual innuendo is present. Trash talking, bullying and rampant disrespect for all manner of authority figures are present. Any time spent on the playgrounds and schoolyards of America will show that words like "loser," "dweeb," and "dork" are the common insults children hurl each other. Those same words are prevalent on children's programming. Kids call each other "stupid" and tell each other to "shut up," just like they do on cartoons. If exposure to violence negatively affects children, and exposure to sexual content increases the likelihood that kids will be sexually active earlier, then the extended argument implies that exposure to coarse language and disrespect negatively affects children too.

In the 1980s this exact finding was reached in a comprehensive study by the National Institute of Mental Health [NIMH] which found that television was an overall socializing force and that observational learning applied to good and bad behaviors.[9]

**Almost all evidence testifies to television's role as a formidable educator whose effects are both pervasive and cumulative. Television can no longer be considered as a casual part of daily life, as an electronic toy. Research findings have long since destroyed the illusion that television is merely innocuous entertainment. While the learning it provides is mainly incidental, rather than direct and formal, it is a significant part of the total acculturation process.**

The argument can be made that "kids will be kids." Children rebel against authority, they call each other names, and they laugh at body functions. Yet it also has to be acknowledged that children are enormously influenced by the culture in which they grow up, and this generation of children lives in a media-saturated culture. Not only can they watch cartoons whenever they want, those cartoons are present on their boxes of cereal, their lunch boxes, their clothes and their bedspreads. Video games and books pick up the themes present in the television shows. Cartoons like *Pokemon*, get their genesis from video games. The themes – positive and negative – are reinforced *ad infinitum*.

Any study of popular culture acknowledges a general coarsening of societal views, especially with regard to the media. The previously cited study conducted by Harvard University in 2004 detailed that content in G-rated films today is more violent than it was ten years ago. Twenty years ago there were in fact seven words you couldn't say on television, which comedian George Carlin turned into a popular stand-up routine. Most of those words now sprinkle the scripts of prime time television. The trickle down effect of this cultural coarsening is being reflected in children's programming. Cartoon characters weren't pulling their brains out through

their noses four decades ago. Bugs Bunny didn't call Elmer Fudd an idiot. Satanic demons didn't populate the world of bad guys. Many tout the belief that today's computer-literate, text-messaging/instant-messaging kids are savvier than their peers twenty and thirty years ago. One must ask if that is because the culture we live in and the media we consume are forcing more mature themes, ideas and issues down the throats of children. It seems that being savvier comes at the expense of innocence, at least in terms of exposure to media.

In a commentary published in the journal *Pediatrics* (Vol. 108, No. 1, July 2001) the following statement was made by Michael Rich, MD:

**Remembering that children under the age of 8 years are developmentally incapable of making a clear distinction between fantasy and reality, we need to reexamine what even our "safest" media are portraying as the ways of the world.**

The PTC strongly echoes this sentiment after our analysis of more than 400 hours of children's television. Are violence, disrespect and trash talk really what we want our children exposed to in the cartoons they watch?

We all share responsibility for the state of children's television today. We often take it for granted that children's programs are, by definition, child-friendly -- this clearly is not always the case. Unfortunately this faulty assumption has led many parents to let their guard down and allow their children to spend hours watching television unsupervised. Young children are especially impressionable, and they learn social norms and behaviors as readily from television as from their peers or parents. Without an adult near-by to explain why the behavior or language they are seeing on television is wrong or inappropriate, those words or actions are easily adopted and imitated.

It has often been said that silence gives consent. Parents must be vocal in opposing the coarsening of child-centric programming. The networks airing these programs and the companies sponsoring them need to know that they are helping to contribute to a culture of violence.

## ENDNOTES

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## **VIII. STATISTICAL APPENDIX**

OVERVIEW – (Total and Average Per-Episode)									
NETWORK	SEGMENTS	VIOLENCE		VERBAL ABUSE		FOUL LANGUAGE		ATTITUDES/ ACTIONS	
		INCIDENCES	AVERAGE	INCIDENCES	AVERAGE	INCIDENCES	AVERAGE	INCIDENCES	AVERAGE
ABC Family	29	318	10.96	16	0.55	0	0	10	0.34
Cartoon Network	262	1330	5.07	176	0.67	68	0.26	172	0.66
Disney	186	177	0.95	233	1.25	26	0.14	157	0.84
Nickelodeon	243	638	2.62	253	1.03	104	0.43	146	0.60
ABC	18	51	2.83	20	1.1	2	0.11	41	2.27
Fox	33	79	2.39	8	0.24	3	0.09	0	0
NBC	18	39	2.17	11	0.61	0	0	19	1.05
WB	98	856	8.73	141	1.44	47	0.48	117	1.19
<b>TOTALS</b>	887	3488	3.93	858	0.97	250	0.28	662	0.74
NETWORK	SEGMENTS	SEXUAL CONTENT		OFFENSIVE/ EXCRETORY		INSTITUTIONAL REFERENCES			
		INCIDENCES	AVERAGE	INCIDENCES	AVERAGE	INCIDENCES	AVERAGE	INCIDENCES	AVERAGE
ABC Family	29	4	0.14	12	0.41	11	0.38		
Cartoon Network	262	69	0.26	73	0.28	105	0.4		
Disney	186	68	0.37	28	0.15	155	0.83		
Nickelodeon	243	83	0.34	54	0.22	146	0.60		
ABC	18	6	0.33	5	0.28	24	1.33		
Fox	33	1	0.03	1	0.03	5	0.15		
NBC	18	4	0.22	7	0.39	4	0.22		
WB	98	40	0.41	115	1.17	57	0.58		
<b>TOTALS</b>	887	275	0.31	295	0.33	507	0.57		

Violence Categories (Total)												
Network	Total	Cartoon Violence	Fantasy Violence	Physical Violence	Martial Arts	Use of Weapons	Violence w/ Foreign Object	Fire	Implied Violence	Death Implied or Depicted	Graphic Descriptions	Other
ABC Family	318	11	84	41	21	92	58	4	0	6	0	1
Cartoon Network	1330	325	263	341	0	135	192	29	15	13	4	13
Disney	177	64	10	70	4	5	10	3	5	0	0	6
Nickelodeon	638	200	136	137	6	50	62	18	13	11	2	3
ABC	51	8	9	16	2	8	8	0	0	0	0	0
Fox	79	0	26	26	2	18	3	3	0	1	0	0
NBC	39	11	7	8	0	8	1	1	0	2	0	1
WB	856	75	249	182	38	102	123	68	9	5	0	5
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>3488</b>	<b>694</b>	<b>784</b>	<b>821</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>418</b>	<b>457</b>	<b>126</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>29</b>

LANGUAGE CATEGORIES (Total)		VERBAL ABUSE				FOUL LANGUAGE			
NETWORK	Total	Verbal Aggression	Threats	Insults / Name Calling	Total	Bathroom Humor	Euphemisms	Bleeped / Implied	Mild
<b>ABC Family</b>	16	2	3	11	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Cartoon Network</b>	176	38	7	131	78	19	6	0	53
<b>Disney</b>	233	15	16	202	26	4	4	0	18
<b>Nickelodeon</b>	253	45	5	203	104	9	13	53	29
<b>ABC</b>	20	0	3	17	2	0	0	0	2
<b>Fox</b>	8	0	1	7	3	0	0	0	3
<b>NBC</b>	11	1	1	9	0	0	0	0	0
<b>WB</b>	141	41	18	82	47	0	4	0	43
<b>TOTALS</b>	858	142	54	662	260	32	27	53	148

ATTITUDES/ ACTIONS CATEGORIES		ATTITUDES/ ACTIONS CATEGORIES										ATTITUDES/ ACTIONS CATEGORIES			
NETWORK	Total	Defiance / Disobedience	Disrespect for Authority / Parents	Lying	Blackmail	Cheating	Stealing	Disruptive Behavior / Tantrums	Pranks	Mob / Gang Activity	Bullying	Peer Pressure	Computer Hacking	Racism	Visual Bathroom Humor
<b>ABC Family</b>	10	1	2	0	0	3	2	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
<b>Cartoon Network</b>	172	13	6	40	3	7	39	3	7	3	36	+1/ -6	1	5	2
<b>Disney</b>	157	4	8	30	2	6	7	15	18	0	50	+3/ -8	0	5	1
<b>Nickelodeon</b>	146	6	7	20	3	5	6	2	6	0	54	-4	0	0	33
<b>ABC</b>	41	6	10	5	0	0	0	6	0	0	6	-8	0	0	0
<b>Fox</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>NBC</b>	19	0	0	5	0	0	0	2	1	0	3	-1	0	0	7
<b>WB</b>	117	18	20	6	1	6	11	5	3	0	15	0	0	0	32
<b>TOTALS</b>	662	48	53	106	9	27	65	34	35	3	165	+4/ -27	1	10	75

<b>SEXUAL CATEGORIES (Total)</b>		Total	Innuendo / Double Entendre	Nudity	Partial Nudity	Cross-Dressing	References to Homosexuality	Puberty / Body Image Issues	Kissing	Promiscuous Behavior	Sexual Activity Implied	Suggestive Clothing	Underwear Shown	Other
NETWORK		Total												
<b>ABC Family</b>	4	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	-
<b>Cartoon Network</b>	69	12	8	18	2	2	2	2	14	1	1	2	6	1
<b>Disney</b>	68	51	0	1	3	1	1	1	3	0	3	4	1	0
<b>Nickelodeon</b>	83	26	9	15	4	1	1	1	6	2	0	5	14	0
<b>ABC</b>	6	3	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0
<b>Fox</b>	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>NBC</b>	4	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0
<b>WB</b>	40	29	0	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	6	0
<b>TOTALS</b>	275	127	17	38	10	4	4	24	3	4	14	29	1	

<b>OFFENSIVE / EXCRETORY CATEGORIES</b>		Total	Vomit	Spitting / Drooling	Flatulence	Burping	Nose Picking, etc...	Defecation
NETWORK		Total						
<b>ABC Family</b>	12	0	2	2	5	3	0	
<b>Cartoon Network</b>	73	14	8	14	22	12	3	
<b>Disney</b>	28	4	6	1	11	3	3	
<b>Nickelodeon</b>	54	16	1	6	25	5	1	
<b>ABC</b>	5	0	2	0	3	0	0	
<b>Fox</b>	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	
<b>NBC</b>	7	0	5	2	0	0	0	
<b>WB</b>	115	15	43	11	37	9	0	
<b>TOTALS</b>	295	49	68	36	103	32	7	

INSTITUTIONAL REFERENCE CATEGORIES		Total	Parental Authority / Responsibility	Negative Portrayal of Parents		Family	Parent / Child	Adult / Child	Educational Authority		Law Enforcement	Other Authority Figures		Friendship	Religion	Religious Symbolism		Occult / Witchcraft / Pagan	Divorce	War
NETWORK		Total																		
ABC Family Channel		11	0	0	0	-1	0	+1	0	0	+3/-1	0	0	5	0	0				
Cartoon Network		105	-4	15	0	-3	-7	+2/-3	+1/-1	-12	+10/-5	0	9	30	2	1				
Disney		155	+40/-22	0	+13/-6	+19/-6	+2	+3/-13	+1/-1	-4	+15/-3	6	0	0	1	0				
Nickelodeon		146	+25/-28	4	-2	+7/-7	-1	+3/-20	-2	-12	+6/-2	0	0	27	0	0				
ABC		24	+6/-1	0	0	+3/-2	0	+2/-2	0	-1	+4/-2	0	0	1	0	--				
Fox		5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	4	0	0				
NBC		4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	+1	0	0	3	0	0				
WB		57	0	1	+4/-1	+6/-1	-12	+2/-5	0	0	+11	3	0	11	0	0				
<b>TOTALS</b>		507	+71/-55	20	+17/-9	+35/-20	+2/-20	+13/-43	+2/-4	+0/-29	+50/-13	10	9	81	3	1				

## SHOWS INCLUDED IN THIS STUDY BY NETWORK

<b>ABC FAMILY</b>	Grim Adventures of Billy and Mandy Hi Hi Puffy Ami Yumi Juniper Lee Krypto the Superdog Mucha Lucha Pokemon Scooby Doo Static Shock Teen Titans Tom and Jerry Totally Spies Winx Club Yu Gi Oh	Lilo and Stitch Lizzie McGuire Phil of the Future Proud Family That's So Raven Sister, Sister	SpongeBob Squarepants Unfabulous Zoey 101	The Menu Wild About Winx Club
<b>CARTOON NETWORK</b>	Jake Long American Dragon Braceface Brandy and Mr. Whiskers Buzz on Maggie Even Stevens Kim Possible	NICK	ABC	NBC
		Amanda Avatar Catscratch Danny Phantom Drake and Josh Fairly Odd Parents Hi-Jinks P Jimmy Neutron My Dad the Rockstar My Life as a Teenage Robot Ned's Declassified School Survival Guide Rocket Power Rugrats All Grown Up Rugrats	Even Stevens Lilo and Stitch Lizzie McGuire Phil of the Future Proud Family That's So Raven	Darcy's Wildlife Endurance Jeff Corwin Time Warp Trio Trading Spaces Tutenstein
			FOX	WB
			Awesome Adventures Kirby: Right Back Magical Do Re Mi MewMew Power One Piece Pet Keeping Shaman King Sonic X Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles	Foster's Home for Imaginary Friends Jackie Chan Mega Man Pokemon: Advance Challenge Sabrina Teen Titans The Batman Xiaolin Yu Gi Oh

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## FOR INFORMATION CONTACT

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## PTC Background

LOS ANGELES, CA — The Parents Television Council is the nation's most influential advocacy organization protecting children against sex, violence, and profanity on television and in other media because of their documented and long-term harmful effects. Founded in 1995 to stem the dramatic rise in indecent programming, the PTC today has become one of the strongest watchdog organizations of the entertainment industry.

The PTC accomplishes its mission via two primary mechanisms: (1) by educating families so they can be more informed consumers of media; and (2) by motivating activism to reduce both the amount and the degree of harmful and offensive content.

Through its comprehensive database of network prime time programming, the PTC makes available to sponsors and viewers an exhaustive list of network television shows that are considered socially responsible; that are uplifting rather than denigrating; that display positive role models; and are devoid of blatant sex, graphic violence, and profanity. With its powerful grassroots coalition of over one million members, national and local advertisers hear the PTC voice when they sponsor programs with harmful or offensive content. In many instances advertisers are unaware of the show's content and voluntarily pull their sponsorship of these negative messages.

The PTC works with the Hollywood creative community to encourage the production of programs that are appropriate for a family audience. When necessary, the PTC targets specific programs that contain egregious levels of sex, violence, and profanity by encouraging its members to contact the producers, network executives, and sponsors. It is a formula that has resulted in numerous shows being pulled off the air or rescheduled to a later time slot.

The PTC awards its *Seal of Approval* to producers, networks, and advertisers responsible for creating, broadcasting, and sponsoring programs with positive messages and that are free of strong sexual, violent, and profane material. The *Seal* is a highly sought-after award with strong economic benefits accruing to the honoree.

The Parents Television Council works closely with elected and appointed government officials to ensure enforcement of federal broadcast decency laws.

The PTC produces highly respected and objective analytical research on television content. Recent PTC studies have shown that foul language and violence on television has literally doubled in just the past four years. With PTC analysts watching every prime time television show and selected cable programming, the Parents Television Council is the leading authority on television content. Its videotape library chronicles every network prime time program since the organization's inception. It is considered one of the nation's foremost authorities for research and information on television content and advertising.

Yet much of the power of the organization comes from the PTC's ability to mobilize a grassroots outreach. With 35 chapters nationwide and growing, the PTC can, at a moment's notice, send a torrent of information to constituents across the country to address and respond to broadcast decency issues. These "feet on the street" carry the PTC message to their community; to local television affiliates; to national and local advertisers; and to local, state and federal officials.

Perhaps the PTC's most important role is to provide viewers with information about current television shows, films, video games, and other entertainment media. The PTC *Family Guide* uses a concise system of "red light," "green light," and "yellow light" to rate television shows for foul language, sexual content, and violence. Families need only to log on to [www.parentstv.org](http://www.parentstv.org) to secure accurate, unbiased information about film and television content as well as a list of pertinent information on important media issues.

The Parents Television Council does not believe in censorship. It strongly advocates free speech and free expression. What it does desire is a choice for families who do not want their children exposed to blatant sex, profuse violence or profanity. Adults should not be denied the right to consume any lawful media, but a balance must be struck to consider the public interest of protecting children from harmful content. Therefore the PTC advocates careful consideration of time, place and manner of adult-oriented content.

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