

Once Upon a Time, We Were All Little Kids Too!!! Influence of Cartoon on Children's Behavior; Is it Just a World of Fantasy or a Nightmare???

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Abstract: *Cartoons were and they will always be a part of children's life. Nowadays, they have a growing influence on toddlers and children because of their attractive content and advanced graphic techniques beside the long time spent by children all over the globe watching them. Is this good or bad??? Is cartoon just a world of fantasy or a nightmare??? Is it safe or risky??? These are the questions which this short communication tries to answer!!!!!!!*

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1. Introduction

Once Upon a Time, I was a Little kid too who loves to watch cartoons. I was watching them in television daily and every now and then in cinemas with my family but what I was watching by that time was completely different from what toddlers and children are experiencing today as cartoons have changed significantly over time. Technically they have become more attractive with enriched 3 D and high definition digital qualities but unfortunately their content has become more and more violent. Moreover, nowadays cartoons are available for watching 24/7 on many specialized children's television channels and even on the run using tablets and smart phones that made them extremely influential with much more time spent by children all over the globe following their favorite cartoon shows and episodes. Is that growing influence of cartoons on toddlers and children good or bad??? Is cartoon just a world of fantasy or a nightmare??? Is it safe or risky??? These are the questions which this short communication tries to answer!!!!!!!

2. Historical overview of cartoons

Animation is hardly a modern invention as some specialists in the field do believe that the drawings found in Paleolithic caves aimed at capturing and recording consecutive movements representing the first steps of creation of moving images. Accordingly, none can be honored for the emergence of animation but Disney hand drawings were the basis of the most famous modern animated films. Recently with the launching of digital graphic era, the advances in animation techniques paved the way for others to join this magic world and even sometimes take the lead [1].

3. When do children usually start to watch cartoons?

In spite of the recommendations of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) for parents not to allow their toddlers below the age of 2 years to watch cartoons and television in general, in a trial to minimize their potentially hazardous

impact on these crucial years of children's life for attainment of normal developmental milestones [2], typically they start to do at the age of 6 months and by the age of 2 years, toddlers usually become attached and even addictive to cartoons. Unfortunately, it has been noted that many parents abusively use cartoons to keep their children away and busy in order to let them peacefully finish what they intend or need to do [3].

4. What is so special about cartoon?

Cartoon represents an excellent source for relaxation, entertainment, and enhancement of imagination and creativity. Furthermore, it fulfills the children's endless drive for exploration of the unknown and learning new things as the alphabet, names of animals, colors, sizes, etc... in a very simple and attractive way [3-5]. Watching cartoon characters mostly enhance the development of interpersonal interaction and social awareness especially when parents join their kids in watching their favorite cartoon shows and be keen to comment on what is wrong or right, what is accepted or not, and what is fantasy or realistic, whenever necessary [6-8].

When cartoon characters deliver an educational or an ethical message, they can support the process of active and positive learning in children who usually relate to those characters more closely than adults in their real life and digest the morals behind what they see in cartoons much faster and deeper as well [9, 10]. Kids usually start to recognize the difference between good and evil persons by watching cartoons; they start to know how to be good and helpful and how to be mean and unkind with others. Prosocial cartoons like "Curious George" and "Sesame Street" usually have very positive percussions on children's behavior unlike cartoons with violent and or antisocial characters like "Bugs Bunny" and "Scooby Doo" which have negative influence on children's behavior and sleep [11,12].

5. "Bakar", animation revival in Egypt:

In the Arab world, we remained for ages waiting for a special Arab cartoon character that can attract the attention of our

children, represent their own heritage, culture, and traditions and speak with their tongue until Mona Abu Alnasr, the Egyptian animation director created "Bakar" in 1998. Bakar is an Egyptian Nubian boy who goes on adventures with his pet goat "Rashida". Although Mona Abu Alnasr died in 2003, this Egyptian series continued till 2007. After its suspension for production and financial problems, it has been reproduced and re-aired in the last couple of years. What is so special about this series is that it delivers very positive messages, stresses on Egyptian traditions and heritage, shows the consequences of bad conduct, and honor and appraise the ethics and good morals and luckily enough, its success was amazing [1,13].

6. How could cartoons be dangerous or harmful for our children???

What is serious about cartoons is that they might have a very negative, violent, or abusive content but yet the parents are completely unaware of how bad such content could affect their children and damage their personalities as adults especially if parents do believe that they are just cartoons; how on earth they might hurt their children!!!!!!

Children do learn by modeling and imitation and consequently tend to imitate the behavior of their favorite cartoon characters [8,14]. If such behavior includes gossiping, eye rolling, and pointing at others in a sarcastic way, they most probably will react in the same manner [15-17]. Watching endless violent scenes between Tom and Jerry for instance can emotionally desensitize kids and make them less and less sensitive to suffering and pain of others and by time, feel no discomfort watching violence [18,19]. Furthermore, seeing the injured Tom or Jerry perfectly alright in the next scene makes children unaware of the consequences of violence and aggression in real life. Accordingly, children might grow into adults who can hurt others both physically and emotionally with cold blood [20-24]. On the other hand, some children might be seriously physically hurt by trying to imitate cartoon superheroes as Superman or Batman [21].

Hassan and Daniyal (2013) [16] investigated the effects of violence presented in cartoons on children's behavior. They demonstrated that children beside imitating their favorite cartoon characters, forced their parents to buy their costumes and accessories. The authors also showed that the behavior of children in classrooms was significantly influenced by what they watch in cartoons. So, without parents around their kids, following what they watch and trying to counteract the illogic, unaccepted, and or dangerous cartoon contents and explain their outcomes in real life, their detrimental influence might be unrepairable.

On the other hand, cartoons are usually interrupted by a lot of ads that usually promote unhealthy foods and drinks which is a risk factor for gaining weight especially if associated with sedentary life and limited physical activities because of long screen time. Furthermore, it is not unusual that children see their favorite cartoon character practicing unhealthy or risky habits as smoking and or drinking alcohol [2, 25].

7. Can cartoons interfere with the normal development of a child?

A toddler who spend too much time watching cartoons alone, especially if they are silent or with only music in their background, might experience isolation, emotional problems, delayed language development, and impaired acquisition of social skills. Furthermore, long screen time might be a risk factor for the future development of inattentiveness, hyperactivity, and or seizures [2,26].

8. What can parents do then? A message to take away and keep!!!!

Parents must understand that their kids are born to start learning from scratch and anything that they might see, hear, or experience will definitely share in shaping their characters and personalities as adults. Cartoon in particular was and it will always be a part of children's life, so parents should not allow their kids to watch cartoons with inappropriate verbal or non-verbal contents. Furthermore, they have to spend quality time with their kids sharing them in different activities both indoors and outdoors. Joining children for watching their favorite shows, reading the books they like, and enjoying the hobbies they love is highly advisable for parents. Putting any questionable cartoon content into context and discussing such content with our children is extremely important to minimize any possible hazardous effects on their behavior and social and emotional development [2,8].

9. Conclusion

To conclude, cartoons on one hand, can be very beneficial for children helping in their independent learning, proper communication, and having fun but on the other hand, they could be very negatively influential on their behavior and development. Accordingly, following the American Academy of Pediatrics recommendation of "Better Safe than Sorry" parental policy seems very wise in raising our children.

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