The effect of cartoon violence on children in today’s society

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There have been several studies on how cartoon violence effects today’s society, especially the children who watch cartoons. Some studies have shown that the children in today’s society are beginning to emulate the violence they see on cartoon shows. The ongoing trend of cartoon violence has expanded in today’s society with more TV shows like South Park and Family Guy. The popularity of these cartoon shows is growing and more and more children are beginning to watch these shows. This paper will examine the link between the violence on a cartoon show and the children’s ability to interpret the violence when they see it.

In an article explaining what children think when they see cartoon violence, researchers studied 3- and 4-year-old children and showed pictures of both realistic and cartoon-like moral transgressions (Blumberg, Bierwirth, Schwartz, 2008). The study was used to figure out if young children can tell the difference between realistic and cartoon portrayals. In Blumberg et al.’s (2008) article the study proved that children can differentiate between realistic and cartoon moral transgressions. Also the study showed that 3- and 4-year-old children viewed that physical violence was more atrocious than psychological violence. “Specifically, hitting was seen as more harmful to others and as deserving of greater punishment than failing to share” (Blumberg et al., 2008, p. 103). The study in this article evaluated the 3- and 4-year-old children and found that these children were able to interpret cartoon violence as a negative. Also the experiment showed that children see cartoon moral transgressions as more appalling than real-life moral transgressions.

In Blumberg et al.’s (2008) article the research shows that children obtain cognitive thinking that allows them to distinguish from cartoons and reality. “Scientific reports can be found that the frequent comic contextualization of violence coupled with the young children’s
cognitive repertoire, notably, their abilities to distinguish right from wrong and fantasy from reality” (Blumberg et al., 2008, p. 103). The scientific support reveals that children may refrain from performing violent acts in real life. The ability for children to separate fantasy and reality relies on their cognitive thought process. The Blumberg et al.’s (2008) article concludes that children have the ability to interpret cartoon violence as “bad” and also that children can realize that cartoon shows aren’t real.

In further support of this finding, Peters and Blumberg (2002) found that preschoolers were able to differentiate between actual moral transgressions and hypothetical moral transgressions. This finding can allow preschoolers to understand the difference between cartoon violence and real life violence. “Preschoolers conceptualize hypothetical and actual moral transgressions as more serious in nature and worthy of punishment than personal rules” (Peters & Blumberg, 2002, p. 146). The research explains that preschoolers obtain a fairly good understanding of physically harming an individual in real life. However, the Peters and Blumberg (2002) article also proved that preschoolers that watch these violent cartoons with a parent are more likely to better understand the actions in these cartoons. “Adults should use the co-viewing situation to not only address questions but also to model and discuss morally acceptable alternatives to resolving conflicts in both cartoon and real-life situations” (Peters & Blumberg, 2002, p. 147). Research shows that parents that watch these shows with their child improves their child’s thoughts of the television program content.

The research gathered in the Peters and Blumberg (2002) article supports the claim of the children’s ability to interpret the violence they are seeing in the cartoon show they watch. The current views on the development of moral reasoning suggests that preschoolers are able to distinguish between moral transgressions and breaches of social conventions (Peters &
Blumberg, 2002). Also the study explained how parents play a key role in helping the child develop a good interpretation of the violence they see on cartoon shows. Peters and Blumberg (2002) concluded that informational assumptions influence how children react when they are exposed to the morality of an action. These informational assumptions evaluate the children’s current beliefs and interaction with their parents. The study in the Peters & Blumberg (2002) article ultimately decided the goal for parents, as childhood educators, should utilize cartoon violence to teach priceless moral lessons that relate to real-life situations.

The Rasmussen (2014) study evaluated 150 children from ages 5-7 and 10-12 and their different interpretations when seeing violence on a cartoon show. They explained how the effects of pre-exposed and post-exposed mediation timing depended on the child’s age. The 10-12 year olds responded better to pre-exposed mediation than to post-exposed mediation and the 5-7 years olds were able to handle the mediations at any time (Rasmussen, 2014). The experiment showed that children’s interpretations can alter due to different mediation interventions. Also the study provided that parents, for older and younger children, should know the content of the cartoon show that their child is watching. “When parents know that their children will be exposed to certain content (i.e., going to a movie with a friend, watching sitcom reruns, checking out a certain book), talking to older and younger children before their exposure to the content may be more effective” (Rasmussen, 2014, p. 409). This study correlates to Peters & Blumberg (2002) study on how parents should help children interpret the violence they see on cartoon shows.

The results of the Rasmussen (2014) experiment analyzed how parents and policy-makers should use mediation to help create positive interpretations for children when watching cartoon shows. The results of the study explained that one attempt at mediation, when the child is
at the appropriate age, can create a positive experience when watching violent cartoons (Rasmussen, 2014). The child’s ability to generate positive interpretations of violent cartoons can be influenced by the mediation process. The Rasmussen (2014) study developed results that are consistent with the effect of mediation on the influence of cartoon violence. The study proved that early childhood educators can use mediation processes to counteract the influence of cartoon violence on children of different ages (Rasmussen, 2014). The outcome of Rasmussen (2014) study revealed that mediation processes help children process cartoon violence in a positive way. However the type of mediation process differs when applying it to children of different ages.

In order to evaluate the correlation between violence in cartoons and children’s interpretations of the violence, it is necessary to perform studies and gather information that will meet the criteria. Experiments that allow children to watch violent cartoons with or without adult supervision can test the cognitive thinking process that children obtain at a young age. It varies with the age and maturity of the child, but early childhood educators such as parents or teachers can help young children correctly interpret the violence and relate them to real-life situations. Although some children can realize the difference between cartoon violence and real-life violence, it is important to examine what can be done to teach all children good morals and better understanding of content on television.
References

